

## Enemy Series - Story 1 - Across Enemy Lines

by Gypsy Silverleaf

Category: Harry Potter

Genre: Romance

Language: English

Characters: Draco M., Hermione G.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2000-01-28 09:00:00

Updated: 2000-01-28 09:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 12:52:15

Rating: K+

Chapters: 7

Words: 22,923

Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

Summary: The first Draco and Hermione romance to ever hit Fanfiction.net back in late 1999! Dealing with the romance of Draco and Hermione, and the prejudices they face at Hogwarts.

### 1. Part 1

#### \_Across Enemy Lines\_

~

< >Draco sat at the head of Slytherin table in the Great Hall, his head bowed slightly in the direction of his food. Crabbe and Goyle sat on either side of him, chomping away heartily on their dinner.

< >\_What am I doing here?\_ Draco was asking himself, glancing around the table suddenly. \_I don't belong here.\_ A nasty, irritable voice replied in his head, \_Of \_course \_you belong here! You are a powerful, rich Slytherin! What more could you want?\_

< >Draco shook his head slightly, being sure that no one would notice him doing so, though. \_I do not belong here,\_ he repeated. \_Of course you do! I don't - not at all. You do! I don't. Yes, you \_do\_, Draco!\_

< >"I \_don't\_!" He slammed a fist down on the table suddenly, not realizing what he was doing until he had done it.

< >The Slytherins at the table stared at him in surprise. The whole Ravenclaw table, startled, peered over at the Slytherin table, and a few Gryffindors who had heard the crash swiveled in their seats to see what was happening. The Hufflepuffs didn't even look up, though, preoccupied with their talk.

< >Draco lowered his face from view and poked at his food with his

fork, turning slightly red in the cheeks. The people staring slowly turned back to their food and chatter.

< >Crabbe and Goyle soon left together, surprisingly full already from dinner. Draco hardly noticed. He had barely eaten his dinner and was currently watching the Gryffindor table intently, through the hair that was covering his face.

< >When the three sixth year students he had been watching stood up and began to leave, Draco brushed the hair out of his eyes. He glanced up at them, catching Harry's eye. Harry glared at him and Draco narrowed his eyes, then looked down when the three had left the Great Hall.

< >The Great Hall was nearly empty when Draco finally left - only a few teachers, a group of Hufflepuffs, and a lone Gryffindor were left. He trudged slowly to the Slytherin Common Room.

< >The dungeon walls surrounding him on the way fit his mood - sad, dripping, tired, dreary . . . \_old\_. Oh, how he felt so old - and yet so young. Was it just because he was in the time of one's where you weren't a child, but not yet an adult?

< >\_No,\_ he said to himself miserably. Then, Yes, he admitted sheepishly. \_I know I am in that time - I cannot stand anyone, yet I wish to be around certain people . . . \_ Draco was frustrated beyond belief. \_But it is true feelings . . . not desires . . . \_

< >He muttered the password to his common room rather absently and climbed in, not stopping to speak to anyone as he trudged to his dormitory. He collapsed on his bed with a sigh.

< >\_I do not - wait, do\_ not \_start that again, Draco,\_ he told himself pointedly, turning onto his back with a soft groan. "I don't want to start that again," he said aloud to the empty room. He put a pillow over his face.

< >"'Course yeh don't," called the ancient, old mirror - with very acute hearing - loudly from across the room. "Now, what don't you want to start again?" it persisted nosily.

< >"Nothing," Draco muttered through the pillow. "Leave me alone."

< >"Touchy, touchy," sneered the mirror with an indignant snort.

< >Draco soon fell asleep after that - temporarily forgetting "that blasted old mirror" (as one Slytherin called it years ago and the name had stuck), his frustration, and basically, his life, as he drifted away into a black oblivion he sometimes wished would last forever.

< >When he awoke, it was morning. He could hear noise from the common room, meaning that everyone was probably awake but him. With a sigh, he pulled himself out of bed and dressed out of the clothes he had fallen asleep in - into clean clothes.

< >Draco walked out of his dormitory and entered the common room, stretching his arms with a yawn. He blinked his eyes twice, his eyes quickly focusing in the dim light of the common room.

< >Crabbe and Goyle were lounging around the fireplace, grunting - or as it seemed to Draco - to each other and playing with Muggle cards. They looked up at Draco as he plopped himself into a large arm chair.

< >"Did I miss breakfast?"

< >"Yeah," Goyle grunted, passing Crabbe the cards.

< >"Why didn't anyone wake me up?"

< >"You said for us to leave you alone," Crabbe replied in his low, raspy voice, turning his eyes away from the fire again to look at Draco. "You don't remember?" he asked suspiciously.

< >"No," Draco replied absently, turning his attention across the room.

< >"Quidditch today," Goyle mumbled at him.

< >Draco had completely forgotten. "Yeah? So?" he sneered back, a bit late.

< >"Gryffindor's probably gonna win."

< >"\_So\_?" Draco snapped back, irritable. He didn't care that morning. Actually, it seemed likely to him that he would never, truly ever care about Quidditch or really anything again.

< >"You going?" Crabbe asked, shuffling the cards in his hands.

< >"Looks like I don't have a choice, does it?" Draco snapped.

< >"What's with you?"

< >\_Just like them,\_ Draco thought petulantly to himself, \_short little sentences that I hate answering to. God, I wish they'd just leave me alone.\_ He shook his head in reply. "Nothing."

~

< >It was drizzling slightly. Crabbe and Goyle dragged out an umbrella, but Draco walked past them, out of the common room, and out the front door, without an umbrella, right into the gathering rain.

< >He strode across the grounds to the Quidditch field, the mist soaking his hair so that it was dark and flat against his head. He didn't care; he hardly noticed his hair, or his wet clothes, and especially not the squishing sound that his shoes made on the damp, slippery ground.

< >Draco didn't sit down, though he probably wouldn't have noticed the water in the seats anyway. He walked around until he found a place where he could just stand without being disturbed.

< >The Gryffindor and Ravenclaw teams entered the field below and a roar of cheering broke out from all around him, the noise pounding in his ears violently. Draco had an urge to cover them, but decided

against it.

< >Soon, fifteen brooms lifted into the air and they were just blue and dark crimson blurs after a few minutes, swooping around each other and whipping this way and that every few seconds.

< >"What are you doing over here?" a voice behind him sneered.

< >Draco stiffened, recognizing the voice. He turned slowly around.

< >Two faces stared back at him; the one freckled face nearly inches from his own.

< >"Like I said," the freckled face repeated menacingly, "what are you doing here?"

< >Draco took a step backward to steady himself. "Hello, Weasley," he said solemnly with a curt nod. He glanced at the other face and gulped, then looked back at Weasley.

< >"What, no snide remark? No joke? Not too confident without your bodyguards, are you?" Ronald Weasley demanded angrily, his facial features taut with hatred toward Draco. "And as I said, why are you over here? This is the Gryffindor side - not your side."

< >"I didn't know we were so segregated," Draco said softly.

< >"What?" Weasley asked, blinking, as if he had thought he'd heard Draco wrong.

< >Draco shook his head, turned, and began to walk away, but Weasley grabbed his shoulder, and spun him around again to face him. They locked eyes, one pair glaring with hatred, the other narrowed with annoyance.

< >"No, you're not getting away that easily, you - "

< >"Ron!" shouted the other face that Draco recognized easily.

< >"Quiet, Hermione!" Weasley hissed, not even glancing at her. He was breathing hard. "I have reasons for doing this!" he yelled in Draco's face, though it was more directed toward himself and Hermione, trying to reassure the two of them. Hermione looked hardly convinced and angry that Weasley had told her to be quiet.

< >"I don't want to fight," Draco said quietly to Weasley, averting his eyes.

< >Weasley laughed shortly. "Yeah, right. Wish you had your goons around, don't you?" he demanded with a sneer of utter disgust. Again, he laughed, but more loudly this time.

< >\_He's grown more confident since his brothers left,\_ Draco noted to himself, slightly amused, though it was soon washed away with just wanting to walk away. Merely this and nothing more, he thought to himself mirthlessly.

< >"No," Draco replied solemnly.

< >"Liar," Weasley spat. "Slytherin is as Slytherin does."

< >"That's a large accusation," Draco said softly.

< >"It's not true, then?" Weasley demanded, smirking.

< >"Possibly," Draco answered loftily, only partially listening.

< >Weasley raised an angry fist and Draco stepped backward a bit more. "You know every reason I have to do this," he warned Draco, malice glittering in his eyes as he glared. "\_Every - single - reason\_, you piece of - "

< >"Ron . . ." Hermione Granger stopped speaking, realizing it was frivolous to try to talk Weasley down.

< >Draco and Weasley were completely oblivious to what was going on around them - the Gryffindor crowd was yelling in triumph for the catching of the Golden Snitch - and neither of them cared.

< >"\_Ron\_!" someone yelled from above them suddenly.

< >The two boys snapped their heads up and saw Harry Potter on his broom about fifteen feet above them, midair. He was looking down at them, wondering what had started \_this\_ fight. Not \_who\_. . .

< >"Fight!" someone yelled and the crowd around them hushed, then broke out in excited whispers when they saw who was fighting. Their excitement rippled throughout the stadium faster than lightning.

< >Draco and Weasley looked back at each other; Draco backed up as far as he could - about six inches, as there was a crowd completely surrounding them, locking him in from getting away.

< >"What, scared? Draco \_Malfoy - scared\_!" Weasley yelled to the crowd triumphantly. He had a very pleased look on his face - he was playing the role of the hero this day.

< >The Slytherins around them booed, but they were drowned out by the other houses' laughing and cheering. Everyone who could see had their eyes on Draco - waiting for his next move or reply.

< >By this time, the Ravenclaw and the rest of the Gryffindor Quidditch teams had glided over to see the commotion. Teachers could be heard yelling in the distance, trying to get through the tight-knit crowd.

< >Draco looked down. "No. I don't want any trouble."

< >The people around him laughed, especially Weasley - whose laugh rose above everyone else's. Hermione Granger and Harry Potter were the only ones that had heard - besides the Slytherins who looked sour - Draco's reply and were \_not\_ laughing, just staring.

< >"\_Really\_," sneered Weasley coldly.

< >"\_Yes\_," Draco said, his voice suddenly cold. "Really, \_Weasel\_." He regretted saying it the second the words spilled out of his mouth. He snapped his mouth shut, wanting to disappear.

< >The Slytherins around, however, cheered.

< >Weasley's ears and face turned red and he flexed his hands, turning them into fists. Draco, not wanting to open his mouth again, turned and started to push his way through the surrounding people again.

< >"You can't weasel yourself out now, Malfoy!" Weasley yelled angrily, jumping onto Draco's back. The people in front of Draco jumped back and gasped in shock and amazement.

< >Draco fell to the ground, grunting in surprise. He gasped for air - the wind had been knocked out of him. He felt the air around him suddenly contract as he was kicked in the side.

< >He heard screams of panic and exult. People surrounded him and he felt himself hit again, and again - and again, then he was beyond feeling the pain of the blows to his back, side, and legs.

< >There was a sudden pounding of feet and a large bang exploded around him. Dark and unforeseen crimson liquid appeared in front of Draco's eyes, then the world ceased to exist.

~

< >"He's coming around, professor," said a voice Draco slightly recognized.

< >"How is he?" Albus Dumbledore's strong voice asked.

< >There was a sigh. "He'll have a scar on his cheek, but, other than that, physically, he's fine. Though," Draco heard a short laugh, "I dare say, Mr. Weasley beat him out fairly well."

< >"And Mr. Weasley - ?"

< >"Not a scratch on him besides when Professor Snape pulled him off Mr. Malfoy here. Gave quite a yell, I hear, Mr. Weasley did." Draco realized suddenly that it was Madam Pomfrey. "I am still admitting him, though."

< >Dumbledore chuckled softly. "Yes, I must speak with Severus, but he was probably in the right this time." There was a pause. "Mr. Potter and Miss Granger report that Mr. Malfoy did not fight back," he said, suddenly grave.

< >Madam Pomfrey's voice became suddenly severe. "Are you serious?"

< >"Very," Dumbledore replied promptly and truthfully.

< >"I just thought Mr. Weasley caught him by surprise."

< >"I thought so, too, Poppy, but everyone around them even say that Mr. Malfoy did not fight back. He was trying to walk away without a fight." There was an interested pang in Dumbledore's tone of voice, Draco noticed drowsily.

< >"I must say I thought he would have been right into the fight as

much as Weasley," Madam Pomfrey said, Draco feeling her take his pulse for the tenth time during her conversation with Dumbledore; however, Draco still wasn't fully conscious and could not protest.

< >"Yes," Dumbledore mumbled softly.

< >"Here we go," Madam Pomfrey said suddenly, "Mr. Malfoy? Can you hear me?"

< >"Ugh," Draco grunted, trying to sit up.

< >"No," Madam Pomfrey said flatly, coming into view of Draco's blurred eyes. "Lie back down or I'll have to - "

< >"Oh, all right," Draco muttered. He flopped back down with a sigh.

< >"There's a good lad," Madam Pomfrey said curtly, checking his pulse again.

< >"Do you have to keep doing that?" Draco demanded, suddenly annoyed at the feeling of someone touching him - anywhere. It made him dreadfully uncomfortable, but he still had his dignity, meaning he would never admit it in public.

< >Madam Pomfrey dropped his wrist and his arm fell onto the bed. He barely noticed it - he was looking up at Professor Dumbledore who was staring right back at him.

< >"Madam," Dumbledore said, not taking his eyes from Draco, "give us a few minutes, would you?" He turned his head to look at her and smiled. It annoyed Draco that Dumbledore absolutely knew he would get his way - he did every single time . . .!

< >Madam Pomfrey didn't look a bit happy. "Oh, all right. I have to check on Weasley to see that his scratch of his isn't infected." She stomped away angrily, pushing through the curtains that surrounded Draco's bed area.

< >"Professor Dumbledore?" Draco asked.

< >Dumbledore looked at him and smiled. "In a fight, were we?"

< >"We were not, sir," Draco replied curtly. He truly didn't like Dumbledore.

< >Dumbledore chuckled. "Of course not, of course not. I wanted to talk to you about your fight . . ." He hesitated. "You did not fight back, Draco," Dumbledore finally said, as if that wasn't obvious to Draco by any means.

< >"No - but how could I? He jumped on my back." Draco narrowed his eyes.

< >Dumbledore looked a tad uncomfortable and Draco relaxed against the bed. "Yes, that could be a reason," Dumbledore said slowly, "but you and I both know it isn't the real reason."

< >"You and I?" Draco grumbled bitterly. "The whole school saw me try

to walk away."

< >"That's what I wanted to speak with you about - Mr. Weasley is even more startled - than I, actually - that you did not fight back. Well, maybe Professor Snape is even more surprised . . ."

< >\_Oh, God, not Snape. He'll be yelling hell at me all night . .  
.\_

< >"I respect that you did not want to fight, when you did not even start it - "

< >"How do you know I didn't start it?" Draco interrupted, sitting up.

< >Dumbledore's eyes twinkled. "Sources . . . rather, many of your fellow students who were watching the situation almost to the minute it began told me and Professor McGonagall, though, I dare say one person had an exceptional view on the whole thing."

< >Draco gulped. "Who?" he croaked.

< >"Miss Hermione Granger - she saw you standing alone and Mr. Weasley begin to pick a fight with you. Even she and Mr. Potter know that you did not start the fight - or wanted to be a part of it."

< >"Great," Draco muttered under his breath, lying back again. If Madam Pomfrey saw him sitting up, she would have yelled, and he could not stand another minute of his head pounding because of it; his head still throbbed of the shouting his ears had already picked up.

< >As if on cue, Madam Pomfrey can barging through the curtains, her mouth opening slightly in protest, surprised not to find Draco sitting up. She recovered herself and spoke solemnly to Dumbledore. "Professor, as I am head of the infirmary, so I insist you leave. Mr. Malfoy needs his rest." She spat out "Malfoy" like it was a curse word, but Draco was used to it and merely sighed.

< >Dumbledore nodded. "Of course. Get well soon, Mr. Malfoy." He nodded to both Draco and Madam Pomfrey again, then literally swooped out of the curtains gracefully, Madam Pomfrey and Draco both looking after him.

< >"I am going to take down the curtains now," Madam Pomfrey told him sharply, snapping Draco to attention. "Don't you even dare sit up. I'll get you a bedpan if you need to go."

< >Draco blinked, partially startled. "Fine," he said, though. What did he expect? The silver platter? No, not anymore, he said to himself. You've gotten enough of it already. And you don't need it!

< >Madam Pomfrey took away the curtains and Draco blinked in the light. It had been dimmer when the curtains had been surrounding him; now, however, it was almost as bright as the sun.

< >Two beds down lay Ronald Weasley, his nose in a book. Draco stared over at him, and Weasley felt his eyes on him, and set down the book heavily into his lap.



< >"\_What\_, Malfoy?" he sneered. "I've already got a week's detention from Snape because of you. And look what he did to me!" Weasley lifted up a sleeve to expose a large bandage - soaked in blood, Draco noticed quickly - on his shoulder. "And \_don't\_ ask what McGonagall and Dumbledore have me doing!"

< >Draco turned his head away and leaned against the bed, part of which was propped up so he could sit mostly halfway up.

< >Madam Pomfrey strode over to him and dumped a few books onto the bedside table next to him. Piled up, they shielded Weasley from Draco's view. He wasn't sure if this was an omen or not.

< >"Homework," Madam Pomfrey snapped at him. "Professor Snape, however, thought it fruitless to give you homework in 'your state,' and sends his well wishes for your health." She kept her lips in a straight line, trying hard not to sneer or frown.

< >"Thank you, Madam Pomfrey," Draco croaked, his throat suddenly sizing up.

< >Madam Pomfrey nodded at him, looking a little surprised at his grace, and handed him a glass of water. She gestured with her head to the table. "Water is always there for you. Are you hungry?"

< >Draco, who had obviously missed breakfast and probably lunch, nodded. "I didn't miss dinner, did I?" he asked slowly.

< >"No - well, yes," Madam Pomfrey admitted. "Dinner is in the process right now."

< >Draco felt and heard his stomach growl fiercely.

< >"And the Gryffindors are having a party," Weasley grumbled from his bed.

< >Madam Pomfrey shot him a glare. "Your friends can come see you. \_You\_, " she said to Draco, "I'm not so sure." She walked away, calling over her shoulder, "I send for the kitchens to bring up your dinners."

< >"Why would she say that?" Weasley asked, as soon as she was out of ear-shot.

< >Draco blinked in surprise, but decided to answer. "Probably because the Slytherins are all completely pissed. I \_seriously\_ doubt Snape would send his 'well wishes' for my health. He probably tried to send a curse." He chuckled softly, despite himself.

< >Weasley was silent for a moment. "\_Why\_ didn't you fight back?"

< >Draco still couldn't see him and who knew if Madam Pomfrey had some sort of charm on him now, alerting her if he sat up? He didn't answer the other boy and sighed to himself.

< >"I \_said\_ - "

< >"I heard you perfectly," Draco snapped from his bed.

< >"Aren't we touchy," Weasley muttered dryly.

< >"When you get knocked out, bloodied, and beaten on the back, and everywhere else on your whole God damn body - you can be touchy," Draco snapped angrily. He grimaced at the pain that had just touched his whole body with its icy hands.

< >"Oh, shut up . . ."

< >"Why should I?" Draco demanded angrily, gripping the bed sheets in his hands - trying not to jump up. "You're the one who beat me up and started this whole damn conversation."

< >Weasley was silent for a moment, bristled. He opened his mouth to speak, but he was cut off by the door to the infirmary bursting open, and loud shouting coming through the door.

< >Draco gripped the sheets tighter and shut his eyes, trying to block out the pounding in his ears that had he begun yet again. His attempts were failing quickly, to his dismay, but when he heard Madam Pomfrey's angry voice, he loosened his grip on the sheets, relaxing a bit. He opened his eyes slowly.

< >"Get out of here! All of you!" Madam Pomfrey was yelling at the many Gryffindors that had sprawled into the room, crowding around Weasley. Most of the Quidditch team, his younger sister, and many others, Draco saw.

< >Madam Pomfrey pushed them all out of the rooms, irate with fury. When she slammed the door and turned around, her face beat red. She stalked back to her office, cursing to herself.

< >When she had disappeared again, Weasley began to laugh.

< >"She was too mad to even speak!" he laughed uproariously, slapping the side of his bed gleefully. "Oh, and the look on her face - absolutely priceless!"

## 2. Part 2

### Across Enemy Lines

< >"For you maybe."

< >"What happened to you?"

< >"What do you mean?" Draco demanded, shoving his books onto the floor angrily - they landed hard - so he could see the other boy across the room. They were the only patients in there at the moment.

< >Weasley set his book on his own bedside table. "You were gripping the sheets like you were holding on for dear life. I can see, you know," he said sarcastically. "You also went nearly rigid."

< >Draco hesitated. "What's it to you?" he snapped.

< >"Fine. I'll leave you alone."

< >"For how long?"

< >"Huh?" Weasley grunted.

< >"A day, a week? How long until I get carried back here on a stretcher - again?" Draco demanded angrily, glaring hard at his opponent.

< >Weasley glared back, but didn't say anything.

< >After a little while, there was a knock on the door.

< >"Madam Pomfrey," Weasley yelled. "Someone's at the door."

< >Madam Pomfrey came storming out of her office, still red. "If they're patients, why didn't they just come in?" she demanded of Weasley. She didn't wait for an answer and flung the door open once she'd reached it.

< >"\_No - more - visitors\_," she said icily to whoever was standing outside the door.

< >"We've brought them dinner, Madam Pomfrey," came Harry Potter's voice. "The kitchens were closing, so they sent us up, and we were already coming to see Ron . . ." His voice trailed off hopefully.

< >"Fine," Madam Pomfrey said irritably, swinging the door the rest of the way open. "I'll be in my office. Shut the door, Mr. Potter." She strode to her office and closed the door behind her heavily.

< >Harry Potter and Hermione Granger entered the room, each holding separate trays. Draco swallowed, not wanting another confrontation. He smoothed back his hair without success - he could feel it sticking up every which way because of the way it had dried.

< >Hermione walked over to Draco with the tray and Harry Potter went to Weasley, the two boys watching Hermione carefully, ready to spring out at Draco on a moments notice.

< >"Here you go, Ron," Potter said to Weasley, handing him his tray.

< >Hermione handed Draco his own tray and was about to walk away when she noticed his books, scattered all over the floor. Draco watched her in amazement as she bent over and collected them into her arms, setting them back onto his table.

< >As she turned to walk away again, Draco mumbled, "Thank you."

< >Hermione jumped and turned around. "What?" she asked.

< >"Thank you," Draco repeatedly, only a touch louder.

< >She blinked, then, "You're welcome." Then, she turned and walked away, over to Weasley's bed, where the three began speaking immediately, though were careful to speak in low enough tones so that Draco couldn't hear.

< >Draco sighed and turned to his food. His stomach lurched. Oh, he was hungry, but this food disgusted him greatly. He turned to the

water cup that he had set on the table earlier and filled it again with water from the pitcher that Madam Pomfrey had indicated.

< >He gulped down the water, feeling sick. He blinked his eyes twice, trying to keep his eyes focused. Draco turned his head to the nightstand on the other side of him and pushed his tray carefully onto it.

< >Draco's stomach suddenly relaxed, though it still rumbled slightly with hunger. He closed his eyes and drifted off to sleep, suddenly exhausted. As if I haven't slept enough, was his last thought of the night.

< >When he woke up, Madam Pomfrey was peering down at him, not six inches from his face. He gave a start, startled, then relaxed, realizing who it was.

< >"Good morning," Madam Pomfrey said crisply. "You did not eat dinner."

< >"Do you greet everyone like this in the morning?" Draco asked, grunting as Madam Pomfrey pulled him into a sitting position, so she could pull the bed into a slanted position to lie his back against.

< >A small, amused smile graced her face. "No, just you." She shoved a spoon suddenly into his mouth and he choked, sputtering in surprise. He was forced to swallow the foul tasting whatever it was - she still had the spoon in his mouth.

< >When she finally pulled it out, Draco leaned over, and spat on the ground. "Ugh!" he cried. He turned back to Madam Pomfrey, his eyes nearly watering. "Sick! What was that?" he demanded shrilly, coughing now over the side of the bed.

< >"Hot cereal - with your medicine. Now," Madam Pomfrey ordered, handing him a bowl, then the same spoon that she had laced with the medicine. "Eat - you're not leaving here for a while."

< >Draco moved to protest, but then he understood why. His back muscles sized up and he grimaced in pain. He moved his body back onto the bed more comfortably, and soon could be seen eating greedily.

< >Weasley was gone, he noticed out of the corner of his eye, and no one else was there. He didn't really mind - as he had caused Draco decrepitude - although he wished he had someone to talk to besides Madam Pomfrey and himself.

< >About two or so hours later, his wish was granted, though he probably wouldn't have asked to talk to this person - given the choice of being embarrassed in front of someone, it would have been someone completely different.

< >Hermione Granger came walking through the door when Madam Pomfrey was trying to force the medicine down his throat again, trying to use the hot cereal trick again; Draco was nearly in a screaming fit, trying to push her away with his hands and nails.

< >He stopped everything when she walked in and Madam Pomfrey seized her chance and shoved in the spoon, holding it there until he

swallowed. When he finally choked it down, she set down the spoon, smiling triumphantly, then turned to Hermione.

< >Draco was still coughing behind her, holding a hand over his mouth in case it came back up. After a moment, he was certain it wasn't coming back up, and began to wipe his mouth of the drying food, muttering curses under his breath.

< >"Hello, Miss Granger," Madam Pomfrey said pleasantly to Hermione.

< >"Hello, Madam Pomfrey."

< >"Here for your detention, are you?"

< >"Yes," Hermione said heavily.

< >"I personally do not see the reason for Professor Snape's punishing you, but I am obligated." Madam Pomfrey sighed and crossed her arms over her chest. "I'll put you on bedpan cleaning. I personally hate the job and I need to do paperwork."

< >With that, Madam Pomfrey gave Hermione short, simple instructions, and then walked briskly to her office, closing the door behind her with a satisfied snap.

< >Hermione glanced at Draco, then began collecting the bedpans, her face contorting with disgust. Draco was thankful that Madam Pomfrey had already cleaned his.

< >Draco stopped watching her and sighed, staring up at the ceiling miserably.

< >After she had collected as many bedpans - clean or not - Hermione dumped them in the sink near the opposite side of the room from Madam Pomfrey's office, and for over a very silent hour and a half, washed them out.

< >She was persistent, Draco noticed as she scrubbed one bed pan for five minutes.

< >Hermione was soon finished after that, drying her last one a half an hour before lunch time. She sighed and turned around from the sink, leaning back against it, obviously tired from the smelly, tedious work.

< >She suddenly strode over to the bed next to Draco and pulled herself onto it. "I have to stay here until lunch," she explained when he had stared at her, "or Professor Snape will go ballistic if he sees me."

< >Draco nodded and moved his eyes away from her.

< >There was a silence between them for a while.

< >"Snape gave you detention?" Draco asked, finally breaking the silence.

< >"Yeah," Hermione replied slowly, looking at him uncertainly. "He gave a lot of people detentions, especially the ones who were hitting

you . . . hard . . ." Her voice trailed off.

< >Draco rubbed his aching side. "Why did he give you a detention?"

< >"Because I didn't stop Ron from fighting with you."

< >"There wasn't much you could have done," Draco muttered.

< >Hermione snorted. "I could have knocked some sense into Ron."

< >"It still probably wouldn't have done anything," Draco mumbled, looking away. "He was out to get me, no matter what." He said these words too soft for her to hear or notice that he said them.

< >Hermione blinked and looked at him in surprise. "Why do you say that?"

< >"What?"

< >"That it wouldn't have done anything."

< >"Oh, er," Draco said, shifting around uncomfortably, "he was too determined. I shouldn't have even said anything - just let him hit me. I know I deserve it. But, oh, God, ouch." He back sized up again so much he couldn't move his arm back to rub the muscles.

< >Hermione allowed a small smile. "Are you all right?"

< >"I guess." Draco shrugged, his shoulders instantly hurting. Do I have to feel it now? he demanded of himself, feeling pain that felt like hot needles were being pressed into his back. He arched his back slightly.

< >"You don't look all right."

< >"Probably because I haven't showered in ages . . ." He could have hit himself. Draco's cheeks burned in embarrassment. Why did I say that? he yelled at himself

< >Hermione laughed. "No," she said, smiling warmly - a first for one directed toward him, "but have you looked in a mirror lately?"

< >"Should I?"

< >"Probably not."

< >Draco chuckled softly. "I'll take your word for it."

< >Hermione smiled again. "I wished I could have stopped it," she said, suddenly solemn, the smile gone.

< >Draco shook his head. "No, and stop worrying about it. It's the past - I just have to get past this. I just cannot believe my father hasn't shown up yet - "

< >He was interrupted by the door to the infirmary being kicked in with a crash.

< >"Oh, God, I spoke too soon," Draco muttered under his breath.

< >His father, Lucius Malfoy, came storming in, looking quite disheveled and furious. He spotted Draco immediately - obviously - and Draco's state at that time seemed to put him over the edge . . .

< >"I demand to see the person treating my son!" Lucius yelled at the door to Madam Pomfrey's office. He was breathing hard - as if he had run from the front door all the way to the infirmary.

< >Madam Pomfrey came running out, her face contorting into a glare when she saw the shouter. "Yes, \_Mr.\_ Malfoy?" she demanded irritably. Her eyes narrowed angrily at him.

< >Lucius looked shocked. "\_Some\_ respect, Madam!"

< >"My respect for you is hardly - "

< >"My son was in a fight!" Lucius yelled, quickly dismissing the subject and changing back to the reason he was there. "He looks terrible! I thought you were a doctor! At \_least\_ - a witch!"

< >Madam Pomfrey glared maliciously at Draco's father. "Your son took a good beating and will be here for as long as it takes to recuperate, Mr. Malfoy. Rest cures better than anything - and I take offense to that, Mr. Malfoy. I request you look up my qualifications - I have very good marks. And I suggest you stop your yelling, as well, Mr. Malfoy, or I will be forced to make you leave."

< >Lucius, taken aback, turned to Draco, ignoring Hermione. "\_She\_ has been treating you well?" he demanded of his son fiercely, pointing a long finger at Madam Pomfrey who had a look of fury on her face..

< >"Yes, Father," Draco replied stiffly. "Very well."

< >"What about the other boy? A \_Weasley\_?" He sneered the name. "What happened to him?" Lucius demanded, turning to Madam Pomfrey. "What happened to \_him\_?"

< >Madam Pomfrey crossed her arms over her chest. "He got away with just a scratch from Professor Snape when he was being pulled off him. Your son, obviously, received the worst."

< >Lucius looked at his son again, an eyebrow raised. "Did you even fight back, son?" he asked, his eyes wide with surprise and suspicion. His eyes narrowed demandingly at Draco.

< >"No," Draco replied defiantly.

< >"What?" Lucius yelled. "Not even a damn kick?"

< >Draco looked at Madam Pomfrey desperately. "Madam . . ."

< >Madam Pomfrey understood immediately and stood in front of Lucius. "Your son stood his ground, Mr. Malfoy, be proud. Now, I suggest, you either go home or go to Professor Dumbledore's office. Your son needs his rest."

< >"He's had enough \_rest\_ - can tell! And get this filthy Mudblood

\_out\_ of here! Away from \_my\_ son!" Lucius shouted maliciously, finally noticing Hermione, and pointing at her furiously.

< >Hermione looked as if she had been slapped, and so did Madam Pomfrey, though Madam Pomfrey also looked ready to start yelling and screaming at his - Draco - father's benightedness.

< >"\_Father\_!" Draco yelled, just as shocked for some reason that was unbeknownst to him at the time. "Get \_out\_! My God, get \_out\_ of here!" His hands gripped the sheets, preventing him from sitting up, and killing his back with pain.

< >Lucius stared at him.

< >"As long as I'm not upset, I'll get out of here soon! But I \_cannot\_ stand the yelling! GET OUT!" Draco screamed. With a groan, he laid back down heavily, his whole body aching, and his heart racing. He gasped for air.

< >The three people in the room stared at him for a few moments in shock, then Madam Pomfrey took over the situation:

< >"Hermione - \_leave\_, dear. If you see Professor Snape, tell him to come and speak with me." Hermione nodded and hurried out of the room, then Madam Pomfrey turned to Lucius. "As for \_you\_, Mr. Malfoy," she said bitterly, "\_you\_ may leave this infirmary \_and\_ this castle. You are going to make your son hyperventilate."

< >"Hyperventilate my - " Lucius started angrily.

< >"Mr. Malfoy, \_leave\_." Madam Pomfrey led him roughly to the door and slammed it in his bewildered face. Madam Pomfrey turned around and leaned against the door, locking it with her hand. She sighed.

< >There were a few minutes of silence, until Madam Pomfrey spoke, her voice sharp and orderly again. "You need to be washed," she told him, striding over to him, and looking in his hair.

< >Draco jerked back defensively. "Alone - \_right\_?"

< >Madam Pomfrey blinked, then scowled. "With \_that\_ back - !"

< >"No!" Draco said, pushing away her hand that reached for his wrist. "As if I have not had enough embarrassment!" He pulled off the covers that covered up past his waist and with his hand, began to slowly move his legs off the bed.

< >Madam Pomfrey looked shocked, then quickly recovered herself. "You'll hurt yourself worse," she snapped, striding around to the other side of the bed. She looked at the situation, then put her arm tentatively around his back.

< >"Oh, no - "

< >Madam Pomfrey cut Draco off. "It's the only way," she said flatly, putting her other arm underneath his legs.

< >Draco wasn't sure if she could lift him, but, miraculously, she did. With barely a grunt, she hoisted him into her arms, and carried



him past the sink that Hermione had worked at, and into a small bathroom.

< >Madam Pomfrey set him on the toilet and made him strip out of his hospital clothes in front of her. After this embarrassing deed was done, she helped Draco into the bathtub, and turned on the water.

< >"Clean yourself quickly. Call me when you're done." With that, she left the room, closing the door behind her.

< >Draco plugged the drain and let the hot water fill up. It was heaven to his aching body. He leaned back, sighing contentedly, basking in the water for a few minutes before he picked up the bar of soap.

< >When he was finished, Madam Pomfrey came in and gave him a towel to dry off with. He changed into fresh clothes and yet again, just as carefully, Madam Pomfrey picked him up, and carried him back to his bed.

< >She handed him a tray, then picked up a spoon.

< >"Oh, \_no\_," Draco said, moving his face away defensively.

< >Madam Pomfrey glanced at him as she filled the spoon with the thick, foul potion posing as some sort of healing medicine. "I'm not giving this to you just because of your bruises and pains, you know," she said.

< >"Then what for?" Draco demanded shrilly.

< >"You had merely a virus when you came in here. You still have it. You've had it for a while, but it will go away after a day of this," was Madam Pomfrey's short and simple answer.

< >Draco stared at her. \_Maybe that's why I've been feeling the way I have\_, he thought to himself. \_Everyone would think me mad if they knew what I've been thinking lately. Crazy thoughts, they are . . . \_

< >Madam Pomfrey looked at him. "You are going to take this straight now. It is nerve-racking enough trying to force this down with cereal and you scratching at me like a deranged cat."

< >Draco hesitated, then nodded. "Oh, go ahead. What do I care?" he grumbled.

< >"There's a good lad. Open up your mouth."

< >Draco obeyed and choked down the potion that tasted ever so worse than before. "\_Thank\_ you, Madam Pomfrey," he said idly with a touch of reprisal in his tone. He coughed loudly.

< >Madam Pomfrey smiled satisfactorily. "While you were gone, Miss Granger and Professor Snape came back," she said slowly after a moment, her smile turning into a frown.

< >Draco looked at her expectantly.

< >"Professor Snape, of course, was furious to find Miss Granger

walking around, and marched her back here," Madam Pomfrey said icily. "Of course, I explained, and then the professor wished to see you."

< >He looked at her, alarmed. "\_And\_ - ?"

< >"I didn't let him, of course, so he left," the madam replied crisply. "Miss Granger, however, is doing me a favor by getting your lunch. I will be in my office. Call if you need me - or tell anyone looking for my services where I am." She strode to her office and disappeared.

< >Draco sighed and flattened his wet hair as best he could. He leaned back on the bed, his back relaxing against it, a pleasant reward for Draco who thought he could not stand anymore pain.

< >After about five minutes, the door to the infirmary swung open, and Hermione Granger walked in, carrying a very loaded tray, and her bag was slung over one arm, looking extremely heavy.

< >"Hello," she said, handing him the tray. She took one plate off, though.

< >"Why are you taking that?" Draco asked slowly.

< >Hermione shrugged. "I can't study in the Great Hall and I figured you might be lonely." She pulled herself into a sitting position on the next bed, and pulled out a book from her bag.

< >"Why would you think that?" Draco demanded sharply, shifting in his position on the bed uncomfortably. "\_At least you're clean\_", he told himself reprovingly. "\_Be thankful of that.\_"

< >"What?" She peered over the top of her book.

< >"That I would be lonely."

< >Hermione hesitated. "Because . . . you looked like you were earlier."

< >"Pansy might come," he replied softly, looking down.

< >"She might," Hermione agreed inimically, looking back down at her book.

< >"You obviously don't like her," Draco said, smiling with amusement at the wall in front of him, and stroking his chin. He didn't look at her, though she had looked up again.

< >"Well, if you must know - " Hermione began, indignant.

< >"I know."

< >Hermione was silent, so Draco turned to his food, and began eating slowly.

< >"How is Weas - er - Ron?" Draco asked with a stammer, breaking the silence a few minutes later.

< >"Fine," Hermione said from behind her book. "Better than you."

< >Draco chuckled softly. "Oh, don't patronize me. Everyone looks better than me." He smiled broodingly to himself.

< >Hermione looked at him. "Almost everyone. You still look better than - "

< >"My 'goons'?" Draco interrupted.

< >She looked down. "I never said that," she said.

< >"I know you didn't," Draco replied with a sigh. He took a drink of water and kept his eyes still on the wall across the room from him. He didn't even dare look at Hermione.

> <p>

### 3. Part 3

#### Across Enemy Lines

< >Hermione shook her head and looked down at her books, then snapped her head back up. "You haven't even touched your books," she said rather pointedly, staring knowingly at his books, since he wasn't looking at her.

< >Draco jumped and stared at her for a moment. "Oh. Yeah. No, I suppose not."

< >"You'll be behind," Hermione said disapprovingly.

< >"Yeah," was all he said.

< >"'Yeah'?" Hermione demanded sharply. "If you don't start soon - " Draco stared at her again and she shut her mouth, looking abashed. "I'm sorry, I don't know what came over me."

< >Draco blinked in response.

< >"Well," she said, looking uncomfortably, "I'd better leave."

< >Draco wanted to protest, but he looked away, wringing his hands together. As she left, he called softly, "Thanks." Hermione looked at him in surprise and he continued. "Thanks for staying around, I mean. I doubt anyone else will be coming by . . ."

< >Hermione nodded slowly in reply, then left, shutting the door firmly behind her.

< >Draco wished the door would open again, but it didn't, and he fell back against the bed, poking aimlessly at his food with his fork, uninterested in it at all.

< >When Madam Pomfrey came out of her office, looking satisfied, her face turned sour when she saw Draco's plate. "I say, if you don't eat - " she began angrily, waving a finger at him.

< >"' - I'll shrivel up like a prune and waste away into oblivion'?"

Draco supplied.

< >Madam Pomfrey stopped shaking her finger and smiled wryly - though it was obvious she was uncomfortable smiling at him. "Exactly."

< >"How much longer do I have to stay here?" Draco asked, suddenly wondering. "I have classes tomorrow. . . Monday, you know . . ." He looked up at the madam expectantly.

< >Madam Pomfrey shook her head and \_tut-tutted\_. "I dare say you will be leaving here before tomorrow's lessons begin," she said solemnly. "If you try to stand, you'll know what I mean." She looked at him sharply. "If you rest . . ."

< >Draco nodded and pulled a book off the table and opened it, knowing Hermione was right that he would probably be behind if he didn't start his reading.

< >The door opened suddenly and in stepped a young Hufflepuff boy.

< >"May I help you?" Madam Pomfrey asked.

< >"Yes, Madam, I . . ."

< >Draco didn't pay attention to anyone else who entered as he read through his books and began his homework that he had gotten the day before the fight. It busied him and he hardly noticed when Madam Pomfrey gave him yet another dosage of medicine. He was, in short, oblivious to the world.

< >By the time he was finished, it was dinnertime, and he was starving. Madam Pomfrey had gone to eat her own dinner in the Great Hall and came back early with a plate for Draco who ate just as greedily as he had earlier that day at breakfast.

< >Content and suddenly overcome with sleep, Draco moved the bed down himself, and fell asleep to the sound of Madam Pomfrey humming a Celtic song as she tidied up the infirmary.

< >"\_ . . the ways of man 'a passing straight, he buys his freedom and he counts his change, lets the wind his days arrange, and he calls the tide his master . . . oh, the days, oh, the days, oh the fine long summer days . . . oh the tide, oh, the tide, oh, you dark and bitter tide . . . and the tide will be their keeper . . .\_"

< >In the middle of the night, Draco sat up straight, ignoring the fiery pain stabbing him from all sides. He was breathing hard and sweating a cold sweat. His dream had awoken him, but he couldn't remember why - or the dream itself.

< >After a while, he settled back, and sleep overtook and seduced him again back into the darkness of slumber, never to be woken again that night.

< >When Draco awoke, Madam Pomfrey had a hand on his head. He looked up at her, wondering with his smoky eyes. "You feel feverish," Madam Pomfrey told him promptly.

< >"No, I don't!" Draco protested, febrile. He was panicked - two

nights in the infirmary was quite enough for him, especially with that awful medicine. "I - I woke up last night," he admitted quickly. "It was just a dream and it's hot in here . . ."

< >Madam Pomfrey peered down at him. "You probably strained your back. I'm suspecting you were probably moving around . . . Oh, all right," she said, giving up. "If you aren't like this in an hour, I think you will be able to make it to dinner." She turned away from him. "But only if you keep taking your medicine every few hours," Madam Pomfrey called over her shoulder.

< >"Oh, thank God," Draco sighed.

< >"Now," Madam Pomfrey said, turning back to him, a smile on her face that made Draco instantly suspicious, "take this." With that, she shoved a spoonful of medicine into his mouth and he gagged.

< >The next evening, he emerged from the infirmary, stepping carefully as he walked to the Great Hall. Everyone was already at dinner, so the halls were empty, except for the occasional passing ghost who didn't take a second look at Draco.

< >When Draco enter the Great Hall, the whole room grew silent, and looked at him. Even the teachers - including Albus Dumbledore - looked over from their places to see him.

< >Someone else, this time, was sitting at the head of the Slytherin table - not that he really cared this evening - so Draco took a seat at the far end of the table, still walking carefully as everyone watched his every move.

< >He sat down and the room was silent still. Draco looked around, turning his head sharply. "What are you all staring at?" he demanded angrily, eyeing anyone he could possibly see without turning in his seat.

< >The room suddenly exploded in whispers and talking - obviously about him, but it slowly turned to normal talk, though the whole Slytherin table was still looking at Draco - and it was not with pleasant or sympathetic looks.

< >After a while, the Great Hall began to clear out. Draco decided to leave sooner than usual and the room watched him leave. He ignored them and brushed past two Slytherin seventh years who tried to speak to him.

< >As he was walking toward the dungeon, he heard someone call his name.

< >"Draco!" the voice called again, more urgent this time.

< >Draco stopped and turned around, backing up in surprise.

< >Hermione Granger was running toward him.

< >He took this in quickly. He could run, but what would that do? He could stay, but what would that do? Draco couldn't decide, so he waited for Hermione to catch up with him.

< >"Yes?" he asked, once she had reached him.

< >Hermione looked at him pointedly. "You do not have to sink to their levels, you know," she told him, narrowing her eyes at him, obviously disapproving.

< >"What do you mean?" Draco asked, reeling.

< >Hermione lowered her voice substantially as a few students passed by, staring at the two of them. "I \_mean\_," she said slowly, looking him in the eye, "don't act like the person I once knew."

< >Draco glared at her. "You \_once knew\_?" he repeated darkly. "You don't \_know\_ me." He was suddenly angry, though he knew it was not with her. He bit his lip, trying to keep his anger from her.

< >She shook her head. "No, but I know enough about you," Hermione said softly. She gave him a small, devious smile and then strode away in the direction to the Gryffindor Common Room.

< >Draco stared after her, pulling the collar of his fresh shirt higher up his neck, feeling uncomfortable. After a few moments, he rushed away to his own common room, where he was greeted by glares.

< >He shook his head, scowling, then began to walk to his dormitory, the Slytherins beginning to ignore him now. Pansy Parkinson rushed over to him before he could reach the way to his dormitory, snatching his arm protectively. Her pleading eyes looked up at him.

< >"Get \_off\_, Pansy," Draco snapped, shrugging her off him, continuing his walk.

< >"Then you \_are\_ like \_they\_ say," Pansy replied after him, her eyes turning suddenly cold and bitter like a chill wind.

< >Draco stopped and turned slowly. "\_What\_?" he demanded.

< >Pansy smiled shrewdly at him. "People see you, Draco," she said simply.

< >"What do you mean?"

< >"People have ears, Draco."

< >"What do you mean?" Draco repeated angrily, annoyed.

< >"People know, Draco."

< >"What in \_God's name do you mean\_?" Draco shouted in her face, the room instantly stopping and silencing, everyone staring at Pansy and Draco expectantly, some even with cruel smiles on their faces.

< >Pansy still smiled, yet more insidiously. "You best stay away from her, Draco," she said, the blood draining from Draco's face immediately. "Our kind and hers do not mix well. They never have." Her smile faded and vengeance gleamed in her eye. "Stay away from the Gryffindor, Draco - or \_else\_."

< >Draco stared at her, then hurried away, the room exploding in cruel laughter behind him. He threw open the door of his dormitory

and slammed it, falling onto his bed.

< >"Well," the mirror scoffed at him angrily, "you \_don't\_ have to disturb my sleep."

< >"Oh, shut up," Draco moaned.

< >After a few minutes, he changed, and fell asleep, sprawled out on his bed.

< >"Wake \_up\_," a raspy voice said gruffly, shaking Draco. It was morning.

< >"Mmm," Draco mumbled, not opening his eyes. "Ten more minutes . . ."

< >The voice's owner shook him again, relentless. "Get up - we're gonna be late."

< >Draco opened his eyes to see Goyle standing over him. "Goyle - " he grumbled, pulling himself reluctantly out of the bed into a sitting position. "Coming. I'll be down soon . . . whenever, I guess."

< >Goyle looked satisfied and walked away.

< >Draco looked at his watch and sighed. He would be hardly late. Goyle probably was just sent up to wake him by Professor Snape or someone wanting to glare at him yet again.

< >He dragged himself to the showers and turned the water on as hot as possible, the parts of his back that had sized up during the night relaxing in it almost merrily, though he knew it would definitely be sore for a few more days.

< >Draco put on his clothes a little while later, then stood in front of the mirror, drying his hair. He turned his face to the side and stopped. A small, white scar shaped like a crooked, upside down, crescent moon was on the middle of his right cheek.

< >After that, he strode briskly out of the dormitory - avoiding anyone who was in there's eyes - and out the common room door to breakfast.

< >The Great Hall was noisy when Draco arrived and a few looked at him, as most didn't notice anyone entering, anyway, when they were engulfed in reading their mail and eating.

< >When Draco sat down, a letter was dropped into his lap. He looked up and saw his family's owl, flapping above him. Draco looked back down, opened the letter, and read:

\_Dear Draco, \_

\_< >I must say your mother and I, especially, are very disappointed with you. Doesn't family pride and dignity mean anything? I am the laughing stock of every wizarding group I am involved with!\_

< >"Great, Father," Draco muttered softly to himself as he stared down at the letter scornfully, "always thinking of yourself - and

you're probably lying." He shook his head disdainfully and continued reading.

< >\_You cannot imagine my embarrassment. That Madam Pomfrey - if she ever speaks to me in that manner again, I must say I will be having another little chat with your headmaster. \_

\_ \_

\_< >Regarding the Weasley boy, I am going to press charges against that family. Look what that boy did to you! Your mother is as upset as I am - and she hasn't even seen you!\_

< >The letter continued along with explaining how ashamed Lucius was of Draco, but he didn't care. Draco was more interested in the third paragraph, rather, more upset. He wrote on the back of the parchment in scratchy, yet still readable, threatening script:

\_Father, \_

\_< >Do NOT press charges. Whatever your motive - forget it. If I must repeat myself, I will. DO NOT PRESS CHARGES. I could have easily hit back and you would have the nastiest of lawsuits where I would be charged for an act of monocle vengeance. If this does not convince you, should I go over to the Gryffindor table right now and curse him? It's really quite easy to do . . . \_

\_< > < > < > Signed, \_

\_< > < > < > < > Draco Malfoy\_

< >Draco closed the threatening letter into its envelope and held it up for the family owl who snatched it and flew away with the other leaving owls, all carrying their own letters.

< >"Draco," someone said near his head.

< >He jumped, turned his head, and his eyes narrowed. "Pansy," he stated angrily.

< >"You aren't looking at the Gryffindor table this morning, are you?" She laughed uproariously, sounding almost like a cackle. When Pansy saw Draco's unemotional face, her smile vanished, disappointed he didn't look angry or embarrassed.

< >"It is enough," Draco said slowly and just above a whisper, "that I cannot even live my life without the simplest \_failure\_, but to have \_you\_ think that you \_know\_ me enough that I will be angry is getting to the nerves in my fingers - " Pansy blinked " - because I cannot stand you thinking you actually know or understand me."

< >Pansy stared at him and he shook his head. "Leave me alone, Pansy," he snapped. "Go away. Laugh at me all you want - I don't care. I didn't fight back because it was pointless, but go ahead and \_laugh all you want.\_"

< >Draco shoved away from the table and strode out of the Great Hall, the Slytherin table staring after him in disgust. About twenty feet outside the door, he ran into someone who stumbled away from him in surprise.



< >"Sorry," he muttered, looking at the floor. He started walking again.

< >"Wait," said a voice, soothing to his ears.

< >Draco turned around slowly and blinked. "What - what are you doing here?" he stuttered, blushing slightly.

< >Hermione smiled at him, then turned serious. "I'm on my way to breakfast. Why?" she asked, looking at him oddly. Her eyes blinked in surprise, seeing the moon-shaped scar - she had never looked at his right cheek since the accident; she had only been able to see the left side of his cheek.

< >"Oh. Er, just wondering . . ." Draco started walking away.

< >"Hey," Hermione said, setting a hand on his turned shoulder.

< >"Ah!" Draco moaned painfully, stumbling away from her. "That's not a good place," he said dryly, turning back to her, rubbing his shoulder tenderly. He couldn't reach the pain spot very well.

< >Hermione snapped her hand back like she had touched fire. "Oh - sorry," she said sheepishly. "I should have known." She looked uncomfortable, then said softly, "Come over here." Hermione strode away.

< >Draco, confused, followed her down the hall a ways near the front door.

< >"Turn around," she told him when they stopped. Draco looked at her for a moment, then turned around. Hermione put her hands slowly and vigilantly on his back and began kneading his back slowly like it was bread dough.

< >Truthfully, it felt more like heaven than hot water did on his throbbing, raw-feeling back. "Why are you doing this?" Draco asked her softly. "I thought you hated me."

< >Hermione paused. "I have to say the same thing," she said quietly, continuing. She kept massaging his back for a few more minutes until Draco's back felt completely relaxed, and he stepped away, turning to face her.

< >Before he could say his thanks, a cold, menacing - though Draco was sure he heard the ring of amusement - voice from the shadows spoke: "Well, isn't this an interesting sight to see."

< >Hermione and Draco jumped and turned. Professor Snape stepped out of the shadows, looking slightly impressed, yet more angry than Draco had ever seen him before.

< >"When I heard the voices," Snape said coldly, "I thought I was hearing Potter and Weasley, because they usually meet here, but wasn't I surprised to find . . . you two out here . . ." He smiled a very sarcastic smile.

< >"And Draco, as if I wasn't ashamed enough with you." Snape looked at Hermione with disgust and as if she was the scum of the

earth. "Twenty points from Gryffindor," he snapped at her.

< >"What?" Draco yelled suddenly, staring.

< >Snape glared at him. "You best keep your mouth shut, Draco, or - "

< >"What is going on out here?" Professor McGonagall's voice demanded suddenly. She walked into the front hall, looking angry. "Aren't you two supposed to be in the Great Hall?" McGonagall looked at Draco and Hermione suspiciously.

< >"Professor - " Snape began incisively, but he thought better of it, changing his tone quickly. "I was speaking with Mr. Malfoy and Miss Granger. I am sorry we disturbed you." He glared at Draco and Hermione.

< >McGonagall glanced at the two students, then looked at Snape. "Yes, yes, carry on. Lessons will be starting in twenty minutes, so I suggest you hurry up with this conversation. Mr. Malfoy, remember, you have an essay due at the beginning of my class."

< >"Yes, professor," Draco said quickly, glancing at Snape, "I remember."

< >When McGonagall had gone, Snape glared at the two of them. "If I ever catch you two alone again, in the situation I saw you in . . ." he warned, scowling. With that, he stalked away angrily.

< >Hermione and Draco exchanged glances, then hurried away from each other in opposite directions, neither one looking back.

< >Draco hurried to his house to collect his books and homework. He emerged from the common room just in time to run to his next class where he dared not look at anyone, especially Hermione.

< >That was basically his day - he kept his head down as he walked, didn't look at anyone, distinctively Hermione and Professor Snape, whose eyes Draco could feel on him, the cold, bitter eyes of a torn man.

< >When Potions was over and as Draco was trying to leave quickly, Snape called, "Mr. Malfoy. You may stay behind."

< >Draco halted in his tracks two feet from the door, wishing desperately that he could step across the threshold, yet knew he couldn't. He waited to turn around until the last student - besides him - had left.

< >Snape raised his wand and Draco flinched, stepping backward quickly, but the door behind him merely swung shut.

< >"Yes, professor?" Draco asked meekly.

< >"Sit down, Draco," Snape replied quietly, pointing his wand at a desk in front of his own desk. When Draco hesitated, Snape's eyes narrowed into slits. "Now," he said sharply.

< >Draco nearly ran to the desk and seated himself, looking up at the professor who was now pacing in front of him, his hands behind his

back, muttering aimlessly to himself.

< >"Do you know," Snape said slowly, still pacing just as slowly, "how disappointed I am with you, Draco?" He stopped in front of Draco, looking at him piercingly, expectantly.

< >"Should I?"

< >"Don't be smart with me!" Snape yelled, whacking his wand down on the desk angrily, making Draco jump back. "Don't you dare be smart with me!" he shouted again bitterly.

< >Draco shook his head feebly. "No, sir."

< >Snape looked at him sharply. "You cannot imagine what I thought," he declared.

< >"No, sir, I can't," Draco replied, cringing slightly, afraid of being hit.

< >"And with Granger!"

< >Draco didn't say anything. He looked down. "I am not ashamed," he said finally.

< >Snape laughed shortly. "Why would you be, Draco?" Draco looked up, surprised. "You shouldn't! I mean, you are going through a period of your life where you are attracted to many - "

< >"Are you suggesting that - " Draco began to yell, sitting up straight.

< >Snape cut him off curtly. "I am merely saying," he hissed, "that many - around your age - are attracted to opposites of their ownselves. You probably have no real feelings for Miss Granger, do you?"

< >Draco stopped himself from jumping up and screaming. He didn't answer.

< >The professor looked at him quizzically. "Most would defend themselves, but you are not most people, are you, Draco?" Snape asked, slightly amused, but the amusement was quickly abating from him.

< >"No, sir, I suppose not," Draco replied softly, looking down at his shoes.

< >"I suggest, Mr. Malfoy," Snape said very clearly so Draco could not misunderstand a word, "that having contact with Miss Granger is not a bad thing." Draco stared and Snape smiled. "The more you are around her, the more you will realize you are not attracted to her.

< >Draco felt stricken. What can he know? He's a man who has probably never been in love! Or thought he was! he said to himself, trying to be reassuring of himself, and attempting to get his confidence back.

< >Snape shook his head, smiling wryly. "Oh, I know this may seem

odd, but it has worked on many Slytherins before you," he said, a touch derisiveness in his always cold voice.

< >Draco almost said, "Has it worked on you?" but he didn't and shut his mouth.

< >Snape, looking quite satisfied and content with himself, smiled, and said lazily, "Now, hurry on, Draco. See you in class tomorrow." He gestured with his hands in a shooing motion.

< >Draco hurried out of the class, not saying a word or looking back, but he could feel Professor Snape's sharp eyes on his back all the way out the door, though Draco could swear he could still feel Snape's eyes on him as he walked to his common room, though that was clearly impossible.

< >"Draco," a voice called. "I need a word."

< >Turning, Draco saw it was Professor Dumbledore toward him. He stiffened in wait. "Yes, professor?" he queried softly once Dumbledore had gotten within arms reach.

< >"I wanted to tell you that I spoke with your father this afternoon and - "

< >"He told me he was going to sue the Weasleys," Draco said quickly. "I threatened him that he had better not or - " He shut his mouth, slightly abashed that he had blurted this all out so quickly. Dumbledore seemed to have a power over everyone - and Draco hated it, but he had already spoken.

< >Dumbledore smiled at him. "That's what he spoke with me about," he said, still smiling. "He declared that 'I was brainwashing you into saying that you would make the lawsuit turn against him.' I also forbid him to see you - as you were in class."

< >Draco started laughing suddenly, surprising himself and Dumbledore. "Really?" Draco asked snippily, chortling to himself still. "I should think he was quite angry, then?" He smiled innocently at Dumbledore.

< >Dumbledore laughed uncertainly. "Quite, quite mad," he agreed, solemnly, "but I do believe he believes you."

< >"Thank you, professor," Draco said, turning away from him.

< >"Good-bye, Mr. Malfoy," Dumbledore replied, striding away.

< >"Good-bye," Draco muttered softly to himself, his thoughts turning dark suddenly. What am I going to do? Snape thinks I'm going through puberty - God forbid that - my father thinks I'm mad or being brainwashed, and who knows what everyone else thinks? To be truthful, he didn't care what the other Slytherins thought of him, but he did care about what some people thought of him.

< >"Draco - " Goyle started as Draco entered the common room.

< >"Shush it," Draco snapped back in response, brushing past him.

< >"I was - "

< >"\_What\_?" Draco sneered, turning on his heel.

< >Goyle stared at him. "Nothing," he muttered, looking down.

< >"That's what I thought," Draco gibed angrily, stomping away to a table where he could spread out his homework, and there he worked in a sort of fury - conversations repeating in his head the whole time - that is, until dinner.

#### 4. Part 4

##### \_Across Enemy Lines\_

< >"Dinner," someone walking by called snappishly to Draco, startling him.

< >"Coming," he muttered, setting down his quill. Draco pulled his stuff together, hurried to his dormitory, and dumped his work onto the top of his chest, then hurried out again to dinner.

< >When he entered the Great Hall, his eyes slid quickly to the Gryffindor table where Hermione glanced up at him. Their eyes locked for a second, then Draco strode to the Slytherin table.

< >"Draco," Pansy Parkinson called to him suddenly.

< >"\_What\_?" Draco snapped, turning to her.

< >She merely smiled at him and pointed to the seat at the head of the table. "Sit!"

< >"Why?" Draco demanded of her.

< >"You always sit there," Pansy replied.

< >"Not these last few days."

< >Pansy shrugged and with a sigh, Draco slid into the seat she gestured to. She looked satisfied when he had done so and smiled at him. Their arms were six inches from each other, Draco realized, as he strummed his fingers on the table. He snatched his arm back.

< >"What's wrong?" Pansy asked, surprised at his quick movement.

< >"Nothing," he replied sharply.

< >Pansy smiled at him again. "I'm glad you're staying away from her now."

< >Draco stiffened slightly. "Who?" he asked blankly.

< >Pansy laughed. "No one, silly," she crowed, batting her eyes lashes at him playfully.

< >Draco forced a smile, then began to eat, half-listening to Pansy as she chattered along, saying nothing of any slight interest to him. He spent his time trying to eat, ignoring the last few pains in his back, and trying to keep his eyes from wandering to the Gryffindor

table.

< >When Draco got up, Pansy jumped up, snatching his arm. He nearly recoiled in surprise, backwards kicking an empty chair, and stared at her. The commotion he had made had made half the hall look over at them.

< >"Walk me back," Pansy said, snuggling against him.

< >The Slytherin table broke out in loud laughter and cheering. The rest of the hall, hearing them, turned, and just stared. If anyone had looked at some of the teachers, their faces were smug with content.

< >Draco was too stunned to really notice. Pansy flashed him another smile and tugged him along out the Great Hall doors, the hall slowly quieting as the Slytherins turned back to eating and talking, and most of the other people losing quick interest.

< >Pansy held his arm protectively, her head resting again his shoulder until they were about twenty feet from the closed door where Draco shrugged her off and away angrily. As she tried to get hold of him again, he threw her off by her shoulders.

< >"What were you thinking of?" he shouted at her angrily, glaring at her spitefully. "Making a spectacle of me!"

< >Pansy put a finger to his lips and he stepped back defensively. "Ssshhh, Draco," she said soothingly, stepping toward him again; Draco took another step back. "I've already gone through what you're going through and - "

< >"Why does everyone think it's puberty?" he yelled anguishly, turning, and dashing away from her. He ran to his empty common room, stormed across the room, and literally flew to his dormitory.

< >"You again," the mirror muttered dryly. "Will I ever get my beauty sleep?"

< >Draco ignored the mirror, picked up his homework, and flung it on the bed. He crawled onto the bed then, closing the curtains so he would no be disturbed. "Lumos," Draco muttered to his wand.

< >In the morning, he was first awake, and first to breakfast out of the whole school. One of the kitchen cooks - a plump, cheery faced one - was in the Great Hall, directing a few broom to sweep up collection dust.

< >"Oh, 'ello," she said with a slurring, thick accent. "Early, ain't yeh?"

< >Draco shrugged. "I guess."

< >"Yeh guess, aye?" The cook laughed, muttering at the brooms. "Yeh can't guess if yer early or 'snot!" She spit as she spoke and Draco was glad she was twenty feet away from him.

< >"I guess - er - I'm early then," he replied distantly, seating himself at the head of the Slytherin table. He strummed his fingers on the table impatiently.

< >The cook shook her head, smiling to herself. She now had her back to Draco. "Breakfast won' be 'eady fer twenty minutes," she called to him.

< >"I don't mind waiting," Draco replied quickly.

< >"Why, \_Mr. Malfoy\_, what a surprise!" came Albus Dumbledore's loud voice behind him suddenly a minute later, making Draco jump nearly out of his seat. He turned around and not five feet away, stood the old professor, smiling.

< >"Malfoy?" the cook squeaked, staring. "Not Lucius' son?"

< >Neither Dumbledore or Draco answered her. Dumbledore strode over to Draco.

< >"What a surprise to see you here this early," Dumbledore said cheerily. He looked up at the cook abruptly who was still staring. "Martha, dear, the dust will just collect again . . ."

< >"Righto, sir," she replied, the broom dropping to the floor. Martha then hurried away to the kitchens, snapping her fingers twice. The three old broom lifted off the ground and followed her in a straight line.

< >Draco looked up at Dumbledore.

< >"That was quite a spectacle last night," Dumbledore said, seeming quite amused. His blue eyes twinkled like the tropical seas on the clearest of days, holding who knew what beneath its waters.

< >\_The sea can kill\_, Draco reminded himself, thinking of a Muggle poem entitled \_Sea Lullaby\_ where the sea played a beautiful Greek nymph of sorts, almost seeming to live to take the lives of children . . .

< >"I - I - " Draco started, then stopped, wondering why he thought he owed Dumbledore an explanation. "Yes, sir, as Pansy would be delighted to remind me, it \_was\_."

< >Dumbledore blinked twice, not expecting such a reply. "Ah, yes," he said a tad uncomfortably, striding away to the staff table. He had expected Draco to become very uncomfortable himself and say he didn't want it to happen.

< >Draco knew this - it was quite obvious to him. \_He thinks he can make everyone be his little party favor\_, Draco thought, suddenly vicious, as his eyes grew intense and dark. \_Well, I refuse to be his.\_

< >The Great Hall soon filled and plates of food appeared on the table. Hermione rushed by the Slytherin table, not even glancing at it. She seated herself next to Harry Potter and began a conversation.

< >Pansy - yet again - sat next to Draco, chattering away like nothing had happened between them the night before. Draco ignored her and checked his bag to see if he had everything, then picked up, and left the Great Hall to his first class.

< >At the end of the day, Draco felt miserable. His back didn't hurt anyone - thankfully - but he didn't think he could look Professor Snape in the eye without screaming. He trudged to his last class of the day, Potions, of course, looking down at the floor. He barely noticed that he treaded onto the back of Ronald Weasley's shoe, and mumbled at him a reply. Weasley snuffed him, not answering.

< >"Today," Snape began, looking particularly smug, "we will be working on a new spell." He proceeded to lecture about the potion for ten, long minutes while the class tried their best not to yawn in his view. Finally, "you will work in partners. Boy and girl. No, Weasley, you can't work with Potter."

< >Most of the Slytherins in the class burst out laughing. The Gryffindors looked down at their shoes, embarrassed and angry, though they would never dare object to this professor.

< >"All right, all \_right\_," Snape snapped after a moment. "Partner up."

< >Draco stayed at his seat, not moving, and noticed Pansy moving toward him.

< >"Ah, ah, Miss Granger," Snape said coldly to Hermione suddenly, "you are not going to be working with \_either\_ of your two . . . \_friends\_. You will be working with Mr. Malfoy." His face became smug again.

< >"But, \_sir\_ - " Pansy and Hermione began at the same time. Snape's look of pure fury shut them up and Hermione trudged across the room to Draco, dropping her bag in the seat next to him.

< >"Get to work," Snape snapped at the class, and ten fires lit up instantly.

< >"I need that - no, \_that\_," Hermione said irritably to Draco as she snatched a root from his hand. She diced it quickly and dropped it into the cauldron heavily, making it splash.

< >"\_Watch\_ it," Draco warned, stepping back.

< >"No, \_you\_ watch it," Hermione snapped.

< >Snape shot them an angry look that said \_Be quiet\_.

< >"What's your problem?" Draco muttered, stepping back next to her. He poured a foul smelling liquid into the brew slowly.

< >"What's \_my\_ problem?" Hermione hissed darkly, throwing newt tails in.

< >"Yes," Draco replied softly.

< >"\_Guess\_," Hermione said sarcastically.

< >"Last night?" he whispered meekly after a moment.

< >Hermione didn't say a word.



< >"Look, Hermione - " Draco started. He looked down at his shoes. "I don't know \_what\_ the hell she was doing. She's just been grabbing my arm and following me everywhere I go. \_Look\_." Draco gestured slightly in Pansy's direction who was watching Draco carefully.

< >Hermione looked up and Pansy narrowed her eyes at her. Hermione looked back to Draco. "Like \_that\_ proves anything," she grumbled, her eyes snapping back to the potion.

< >"I guess it doesn't," Draco admitted, chagrined. "Snape spoke to me yesterday afternoon," he said softly after a moment. He dropped a small amount of lupine into the dark peach colored liquid.

< >"I know," said Hermione irritably.

< >"He - he said," Draco began quietly, "that \_since I am going through puberty\_ what I am \_feeling\_ for you is merely hormonal\_ and I should be around you as much as possible so I \_know\_ my body isn't right\_." He was seething by the time he finished. "That's almost \_exactly\_ what Pansy told me last night before I escaped from her."

< >Hermione snorted.

< >"You don't believe me," said Draco certainly.

< >"Is it that obvious?"

< >"\_Hermione\_," he hissed, nudging her foot with his. She glared at him out of the corner of her eye, but waited for him to speak. "I have to know - if you hadn't, er, rather Pansy hadn't done what she did . . ."

< >Hermione looked down, knowing the question. "Get to work, Malfoy," she said defiantly after a moment, but her voice wavered a bit as she said "Malfoy," as if not wanting to address him that way.

< >Draco didn't move and Hermione looked up. "I said - " she began.

< >"I know exactly what you said," Draco snapped loudly.

< >Half the class looked over at them. Harry Potter and Weasley looked especially interested from their own areas. Snape glared at them from his desk.

< >"I \_know\_ what you said," Draco said more quietly, as everyone turned back to their work.

< >"Then get to work."

< >"What's the point?" he demanded.

< >Hermione stared at him. "Our \_grade\_." She looked back down at the cauldron.

< >"Oh!" said Draco in a low tone, mock horror lacing his voice, "our \_grade\_." He scowled angrily at her. "Is that all you worry about? \_Your\_ grade, \_your\_ reputation, \_yourself\_?"

< >Hermione didn't answer, but he could see her eyes glistening. "You don't understand," she said softly. She said no more and began stirring the potion that was now turning a sort of sea green.

< >"Damn right I don't understand!"

< >Hermione slammed down her spoon and turned to him, ready to shout.

< >"Well, Mr. Malfoy and Miss Granger," came Snape's sharp, sudden voice as he strode over to them. "Making progress, are we?" He smiled, seeming quite a self-satisfied man. "You seem to be deep in conversation."

< >"The conversation is about the potion," Draco said quickly and convincingly, smiling idly at Snape. "We do have our differences, professor, if you were not aware of that fact."

< >"I am quite aware, Mr. Malfoy," Snape replied distantly, peering into their cauldron. "Good, good." With that, he strode off to terrorize Lavender Brown and Neville Longbottom, Draco and Hermione staring after him.

< >"Why did you do that?" Hermione hissed.

< >"What - you actually think I would tell him the truth, even though I am his favorite," Draco sneered. He shook his head and dropped in the last ingredient - a vial of blood from a banshee.

< >"That's it," Hermione muttered, pulling out the spoon. "We have to wait now."

< >"I'm not an idiot," Draco snapped as they sat down.

< >Hermione glanced at him. "Yeah, well you made me look like a fool."

< >"How?" Draco demanded shrilly.

< >"In the hall . . ." Hermione said softly.

< >Draco snapped his mouth shut, stopping himself from yelling. "You did it."

< >"You allowed it!"

< >Draco narrowed his eyes at her. "Don't tell me that crap."

< >"What should I tell you then?" Hermione scoffed spitefully.

< >"Answer my question, if you'll dare say anything more to me," Draco retorted.

< >Hermione blinked in surprise and looked down. "What's the point?" she moaned softly, more to herself. Her eyes began glistening again, but so were Draco's from the onion-smelling potion. "Professor Snape and Pansy are probably right."

< >Draco, stricken, wanted to scream. "How can you say that?" he asked, reproofing.

< >Hermione looked at him sharply, any trace of tears gone. "I did you a favor, Draco," she said with an edge to her voice. "I didn't have to bring you your meals, I didn't \_have\_ to talk to you - I didn't \_have\_ to do anything."

< >"But you \_did\_," Draco replied.

< >Hermione closed her eyes. "It's not as simple as you think it is."

< >"Tell me why not."

< >She shook her head vigorously. "No - not \_here\_."

< >Draco was taken aback. "Y-you actually want to tell \_me\_?" he sputtered.

< >Hermione nodded slowly and turned her head to the front of the classroom where it stayed until Professor Snape came around again, grading their potion, and yelled at the class to clean up. He looked satisfied with himself - as he always did - when he was finished and waved the class out the door irritably.

< >"Tonight - after dinner," Hermione muttered under her breath as she stood up.

< >Draco opened his mouth, but Hermione cut him off.

< >"Near the front hall," she continued quickly. "There's a small corridor. Go down that way and we'll talk." Hermione glanced at him expectantly as she shoved a book into her bag.

< >"Hermione," Draco said slowly, "there is no small corridor - "

< >"Yes, there \_is\_," Hermione replied crisply. "It's there - tell yourself that and you'll see it." With that, she picked up her bag and hurried out of the room to catch up with Potter and Weasley.

< >Draco quickly put his things into his own bag, flashed Snape as innocent a smile as he could manage, and made his way quickly out the door of the room.

< >After dinner, Draco made his way inconspicuously out of the Great Hall - Hermione had long since left - leaving when Pansy wasn't looking. He walked carefully down to the front hall and stopped, looking around, doubtful.

< >There was no secret corridor. What was she playing at? Draco sighed and flexed his hand, trying to relax himself. \_Hermione said if I think it's there - it's there\_, he told himself reassuringly.

< >Suddenly, in the middle of a bare part of one wall, the wall shivered, and seemed to melt away, exposing a narrow corridor, hardly big enough for two people to stand in front of each other in.

< >Slowly, Draco stepped in, being tentative - it could be an illusion.

< >The walls instantly pressed in at this thought, as if it truly knew what Draco was thinking. It only relaxed when Draco chanted in his head that the corridor was real and it was not an illusion.

< >"There you are," Hermione said irritably, stepping into view at the end of the long, dark corridor. She put her hands on her hips and a small smile danced across her face at the sight of him.

< >"Well, no one told me that the damned thing could read my thoughts," Draco muttered, going as fast as he could without tripping down the passage, Hermione coming into focus more clearly with every step.

< >Hermione turned and strode away from the opening so he could follow her. She shook her head as she went. "It can't read your mind - that's quite impossible. It's the charm that knows what you're feeling."

< >"How'd you know this was here?" Draco asked as he trudged behind her. They were going a long way, he noticed quickly. Potter and Weasley must know about this place. "You couldn't have fallen through that."

< >"I have my ways," Hermione replied simply, beginning to climb a tall, sharp-turning stair case, Draco quickly following.

< >"Where are we going?"

< >"Up."

< >"Well, now," Draco said sarcastically, "isn't that obvious."

< >Hermione was silent for a moment. "Yes," she replied mysteriously. "Up."

< >Draco sighed, irritable, and kept following. Finally, after about five minutes, they reached a trap door in the ceiling. Hermione pulled down on the cord attached to it and pulled herself up. Draco did the same, pulling the trapdoor shut behind him.

< >Hermione muttered to her wand and it lit up. She tapped it to a single candle on one of the only pieces of furniture - a desk - and it lit up, filling the room with a golden glow.

< >Draco looked up and saw they were in a tower. There was only one window, but it was locked tight from the inside, a pillow, he noticed, shoved against its shutters, so it would block out the light.

< >"Sit down," Hermione said, gesturing to a large armchair in the corner. She sat herself in the one across from it.

< >Draco seated himself carefully, wary. "How did you get these up here."

< >"They're from Ginny's old dollhouse." Draco stared and Hermione laughed. "The dollhouse was antique and had tiny, but real furniture - Ron found them when he went back for Christmas last year. We just put a potion on them and they enlarged." She shook her head, smiling as if remembering that second.

< >"What did you want to talk about?" Draco asked after a minute, strumming his fingers on the arm of the chair nervously. He stopped himself immediately, embarrassed, and clasped his hands in his lap.

< >Hermione lost her smile immediately. "When . . . when I saw Pansy and you last night, you should have been next to me. I was nearly shaking in rage. Harry snapped me out of it when he tapped my shoulder, but I . . . I couldn't \_believe\_ I was so angry, so hateful, so . . . jealous."

< >Draco stared at her in amazement. "Hermione, I . . ." He was at a loss for words.

< >"Somehow, even though you wouldn't believe how much I have held against you for so many years," Hermione said softly, looking away.

< >Draco felt like she had slapped him again. He closed his eyes. "I don't deserve this," he said suddenly, jumping to his feet.

< >Hermione looked at him in surprise. "What?" she asked.

< >"\_This\_," Draco said, pointing at her. "I didn't deserve getting handed dinner, my books stacked back up on the nightstand, having a conversation with you, or anything you have done for me. I don't deserve \_you\_."

< >"No, you don't," Hermione agreed. "Sit back down."

< >Draco obeyed, falling back into the chair miserably. "Why is this happening?" he wondered aloud, staring up at the ceiling of the tower above them.

< >"How am I supposed to know?" Hermione demanded.

< >Draco ignored the last remark. "Snape and Pansy \_both\_ told me I am only attracted to you because of puberty, as I said earlier. But \_Snape\_ told me very clearly that opposites attract and I have no real feelings toward you."

< >"Do you believe that?" Hermione asked.

< >"No."

< >The two sat in silence for a while, until Hermione spoke:

< >"You know what we're doing is mad, don't you?" Draco looked at her and she laughed sarcastically. "Gryffindor and Gryffindor is great! As with all the houses - Ravenclaw and Gryffindor - okay - and also with Gryffindor or a Ravenclaw with a Hufflepuff - though I must say quite laughable. But Gryffindor and Slytherin? It's \_scandalous\_ in \_this\_ school!" She shook her head in disgust.

< >"It's a stupid rivalry taken out of proportion," Draco muttered.

< >Hermione raised an eyebrow. "That's not what you would have said a year ago."

< >"I know," Draco replied softly.

< >"You realize we have to cover this up from other people?" she asked.

< >Draco nodded solemnly.

< >Hermione looked at her watch. "Great," she mumbled.

< >"What?"

< >Hermione sighed and stood up, Draco following. She blew out the candle, the room turning mostly dark, then turned back to him. "We have to go now. Filch patrols the front hall for an hour and we don't want to be stuck here for that long."

< >"Why not?"

< >Hermione glared at him and Draco shut his mouth. She stalked off and he followed her back to the corridor which had closed itself again, to Draco's eyes. He hadn't a clue where it was located in the wall, but Hermione did. She walked right through the wall, it seemed.

## 5. Part 5

### Across Enemy Lines

< >Draco gaped after her and a second later, half of her body leaned through the wall.

< >"You coming?" Hermione asked him.

< >When Draco blinked, the corridor appeared. "Yes," he said quickly and shrilly, "of course." He followed after her, stopping behind her at the end of the corridor; he saw Filch stride by, his vicious cat trailing after his heels.

< >"You ever wonder why Mrs. Norris is called Mrs., Draco?" Hermione whispered.

< >"What?" Draco asked, startled at the question.

< >"Shush," Hermione hissed, waving at him behind her back. A minute later, "Okay, I'm going." She stepped out into view and turned the other way, walking away briskly.

< >Draco peered around the corners as far as he could with out sticking even a millimeter of his hair out into the front hall. Filch was coming back the other way, he realized, jumping back.

< >Mrs. Norris stopped after Filch had past by Draco's hiding place. She looked up at the wall, as if looking him in the eye. She then turned and padded after Filch and Draco sighed a deep breath of relief.

< >He peered around the corner, then hurried out the corridor, nearly racing to his common room like a lightning bolt. Pansy, though, was

waiting impatiently for him at the entrance.

< >"\_Where\_ have you been?" she asked, looking suspicious.

< >"Why should I tell you?" Draco demanded angrily, pushing away her reaching hand. "You have no business in asking where I go or why, you - " He had been ready to call her a name, but she cut him off.

< >"Yes, I do, Draco!" she yelled.

< >Draco had been trying to reach the entrance, but he now stopped, and slowly turned his head to her. Her words sunk in and he turned all the way around to her. "\_What\_?" he said, grinding his teeth together viciously.

< >Pansy looked lost. "I thought you liked me," she sniffed pathetically.

< >Draco threw back his head and laughed cruelly. "Why would you \_ever\_ think - "

< >"Third year, you always smiled at me - " Pansy began.

< >"\_Three\_ years ago, Pansy!" he shouted in her face. "\_Three\_ years! And I always thought you were shrewd! Look in the mirror - you look pathetic, hanging onto someone who \_can't stand you\_!"

< >"What?" Pansy gasped, stepping back, looking unbelieving.

< >"I don't like you, Pansy," Draco growled. "I never have - and I \_never\_ will."

< >Pansy stared at him, then suddenly began sobbing, and ran away. Draco felt bad and rather ashamed of being so blunt, but what had she done to him? He shook his head and climbed into the Slytherin common room.

< >Everyone was looking at him; they had obviously heard the shouting.

< >Crabbe and Goyle signaled to him and, with a sigh, he strode over to the fireplace, and seated himself in a chair in front of the two, gruff-looking boys. They were yet again playing cards.

< >"What happened out there?" Goyle asked.

< >"Pansy," Draco said simply. "Trying to hang onto me again."

< >"I thought you liked her," Crabbe said.

< >Draco stared at him. "Why does everyone think that?"

< >"She's always following you around," Crabbe replied, putting down a card. "She tells everyone who'll listen you two are together. And it looks like she says." He glanced up at Draco.

< >"She said she thought I liked her because I smiled at her."

< >"And you do," Crabbe replied - he'd gotten brighter over the years, though not a bit less tougher than he looked, so everyone

usually thought he was a big, walking, talking idiot, like Goyle was still. "You're always smiling - smugly, but she doesn't see that. All she sees is you smiling at her, all the time."

< >"You're annoying," Draco snapped at him.

< >"Guess I am," Crabbe laughed, setting down another card, looking proud of himself that he was winning. "But it's true. You thought she'd come see you in the infirmary, didn't you?"

< >"Yes," Draco said sheepishly.

< >"You're attached to her."

< >"I am not!"

< >Crabbe's face broke into a smile. "Not attracted, but just attached to her, like you are us." His face grew serious again, as his eyes turned dark, looking at Draco. "You don't know us or like us that much - like Pansy - but if you miss one of us, you feel lost or angry."

< >Draco was ashamed to admit he was right. "Maybe."

< >Crabbe didn't reply as he shuffled the cards again, having won. When he was finished and dealing out the cards to himself and Goyle, he spoke, "Pansy didn't come to see you in the infirmary because she was jealous. She spread it around the house that you were 'in love' with Hermione Granger, because she's seen you looking in her direction."

< >"You believe her?" Draco demanded, raising an eyebrow.

< >Crabbe looked at him with surprise. "I didn't believe it at first, but then I watched you one night - last Friday, because Pansy had been saying that since Wednesday - and sure enough, you were."

< >Draco's eyes darkened, remembering he really had to cover himself. "Why would I like her?" he scoffed half-heartedly. Well, that's convincing, Draco\_, he chided himself bitterly.

< >Crabbe shrugged. "I don't know - but what were you looking at?"

< >"Planning Weasley's demise," Draco spat sarcastically. He hesitated a moment. "Staring into space, I guess, actually . . ."

< >Crabbe chuckled. "Yeah, sure, Malfoy," he replied, sounding amusedly doubtful.

< >"What's that supposed to mean?" Draco snapped.

< >"Settling every night on the Gryffindor table," Crabbe replied delicately, "then suddenly not? That's hardly kosher." He blinked in surprise when Goyle put down a card.

< >"Since when is it your business - or anyone's, especially Pansy's - of looking into my life? It's my life! I look where I look!" Draco snapped. "It means nothing. My eyes settled on



something."

< >"Then where did you disappear to, after dinner? Pansy came in three times, begging Goyle and me to check our dormitory for you - you weren't there. Where did you go? She checked the library and anywhere else she could."

< >"In a half an hour?"

< >Crabbe smiled crookedly. "She's fast."

< >"And probably overlooked me. I was talking with someone."

< >"Who?"

< >Draco stiffened. "What's it to you?"

< >Crabbe looked up, surprised, then said, "I think you're out with someone." At the sight of Draco's face, he grinned mysteriously. "Of course, knowing you, it wouldn't be with a Gryffindor - especially Hermione Granger, being Muggle an' all and the way you feel. Probably a Ravenclaw, huh?"

< >Draco winced and Crabbe laughed. "I knew it!"

< >"Well, er, don't say a word."

< >"I won't," Crabbe promised, looking back to his game. "Hey!" he shouted at Goyle angrily, looking stricken that he'd lost without noticing. Goyle was the one smiling smugly now.

~

< >On Monday, after breakfast, Draco was hurrying down a crowded hall with Crabbe. He saw Hermione and Potter coming the opposite way and he was immediately wary of anyone around him.

< >Hermione looked at him expectantly. She opened her coming palm slightly, exposing a piece of folded parchment. He understood and when they passed each other, he snatched the parchment from her hand, unnoticed by anyone.

< >In History of Magic, a few hours later, during yet another sleep endowing, boring lecture by the ghost professor, he opened the folded parchment. In shiny, graceful, maroon lettering, it said:

Draco, \_

< >It seemed to me last night this may be the only way to communicate by sometimes meeting in the tower, but there hardly time for that because I have no idea when Harry or Ron may be in there, unless I know for sure that they won't be. \_

\_ \_

< >Meet me in the tower again tomorrow night - they told me they're studying up there and they need my help. \_

\_ Love, \_

\_< > < > < >Hermione\_

< >After dinner, without looking once at Hermione, he went to the back of the library, and took out a piece of his own parchment. Draco pulled out his quill and began to write in green ink.

\_Hermione, \_

--

\_< >Meet you there tomorrow night. See you there. \_

--

\_< >Draco\_

< >Draco quickly folded the simple letter and began his homework for the night. Thirty minutes later, restless, he collected his things, and hurried to his common room. Crabbe and Goyle were sitting next to the fire, not playing cards this time, though.

< >"You're late," Crabbe muttered at him.

< >The blood from Draco's face drained. "Oh, God . . ."

< >"Yeah, 'Oh, God . . .' You-Know-Who is going to be - "

< >Draco stormed away, cursing himself bitterly. He charged to his common room and threw his homework on his bed. "To hell with it," he muttered.

< >"What?"

< >"\_You\_," Draco snapped back instantly. "Do you \_ever\_ shut up?"

< >"I \_could\_ socialize," sniffed the mirror. "But no one has moved me in fifty years. Would you talk to the headmaster . . . Dippet for me?" The mirror shifted uncomfortably.

< >"Can I asked how many times people in this room have said \_Albus Dumbledore\_ in this room?" Draco demanded, petulant, and wondering why he'd even bothered saying a word to the mirror.

< >The mirror was silent. "Mirrors never forget," it said softly.

< >"Yeah, sure," Draco replied.

< >"So I'm a stupid mirror!" the mirror cried miserably, sounding as if it was sobbing. "I don't pay attention to you bloody people anymore! Haven't for years!"

< >Draco sighed and didn't reply. "Bloody hell," he muttered a few minutes later, thinking what his captain was going to say to him in the morning. Draco figured he should steer away from the tyrant of a seventh year, but, realizing he didn't care that moment, sank onto his bed, face first.

< >"Would you ask \_Albus Dumbledore\_ to move me?" the mirror asked meekly.

< >Draco looked up, surprised, yet amused. "Sure," he replied.

< >Sighing contentedly, the mirror fell silent, and Draco turned over to finish his homework falling asleep about two hours later when Goyle and Crabbe had come in, mumbling at him about how he was going to get a beating in the morning.

< >The beginning of the next morning was a blur. His captain, looking angrier than the wrath of hell, starting yelling at him as soon as he walked into the Great Hall, spotting Draco. He had kept this up for a few minutes, everyone watching, until Draco couldn't help but burst out laughing, seeing how purple the older boy was.

< >Crabbe had started laughing too, and soon almost the whole hall was laughing. Only Draco's captain wasn't laughing. He still looked angry - but now he ten times more embarrassed than angry.

< >Some people were nearly crying still, even after the abashed seventh year had sat down, his face turning back to normal color. Even Professor Snape was seen with an amused smile on his face.

< >When Draco passed Hermione in the hall, he glanced at her, then dropped the note into her bag, almost missing, but it made it, thankfully for both them.

~

< >"Same pairs," Snape snapped at them, after explaining a long, complex potion to the class for nearly twenty minutes. "You worked fine yesterday - better than ever, probably," he said dryly.

< >The class shuffled around and soon, Draco and Hermione were next to each other again, muttering instructions to each other, trying to talk in-between.

< >"Unicorn hair," Hermione said, pointing. "Meeting."

< >"How much?" Draco asked distractedly, reaching for a vial of wolfsbane.

< >"Twenty strands." Hermione took the vial from him and added it and dragon's blood into the fetid smelling potion that was overpowering the entire room. "Tomorrow night."

< >"Am I supposed to count that? Tomorrow?"

< >"Yes, tomorrow. Yes, count."

< >Draco cursed and began counting. "What are we going to do?"

< >"Add those," Hermione muttered. "Talk."

< >Draco threw the hairs and a handful of nightshade into the cauldron and there was a loud explosion that sent them both back flying. The class gasped and Draco and Hermione nearly toppled onto the table behind them.

< >For a few seconds, they were lost in the white smoke, but everyone could hear them coughing. Draco and Hermione emerged suddenly,

looking surprised as the waved at the smoke, eyes watering.

< >"Was that \_supposed\_ to happen, professor?" Draco demanded angrily of Snape.

< >Snape smiled coyly at them, striding over. He peered into their cauldron. "Yes."

< >The rest of the class stared at their own potions, then at their partners nervously. Snape smiled again, looking delighted at their faces. "Continue," he said sternly. \_Or else\_, everyone knew.

< >During the next ten minutes, there were explosions, and students flying backwards, or coming up from under the desks they'd been hiding under already. Then things became quieter.

< >"It's the nightshade," Draco said to Hermione irritably - and a bit loudly. "It doesn't matter the order you put the ingredients in - I'm watching - but when you put the nightshade into the damn thing . . ."

< >\_Boom\_, they both mouthed in unison.

< >When the potion was finished and everything was cleaned up, Snape collected himself from his desk, and stood up. "As I know Mr. Malfoy and Miss Granger have realized, it was the nightshade." He smiled at the two and pointed everyone to the door.

< >The next day, after dinner, Draco slipped away from the Great Hall, unnoticed. He hurried down the hall and disappeared into the wall. Since he had gotten there first, he went to the tower and lit the candle, then settled into a chair.

< >Hermione appeared ten minutes later, looking flustered. "Sorry," she apologized quickly. "Harry was telling me something boring, but I couldn't just leave him there when Ron wasn't listening either . . ."

< >"'Course not," Draco said, understanding.

< >Hermione seated herself in the chair and began a slow, but gradual conversation. Draco poured his heart out to her; he'd never said any of this to anyone before in his life. Hermione listened attentively to every word, and didn't flinch once when he repeatedly apologized to her about what he had done to her.

< >Suddenly, when he had silenced himself, chagrined, she strode over to him. "Move over," she said quietly, gesturing with her hand. Though surprised, Draco moved over in the armchair, and Hermione sat down next to him, patting his hand lightly.

< >He was stiff in his place for a few minutes, but slowly relaxed next to her.

< >"Two different worlds, two different people," Hermione whispered.

< >"Going across enemy lines," Draco murmured back.

< >"So we are."

< >Draco closed his eyes, leaning back against the chair. "And what hell will break loose when word gets out," he muttered dryly.

< >Hermione shook her head. "It won't get out."

< >"Someday it will," Draco said, opening his eyes.

< >Hermione sighed and put a finger to his lips. This time, he didn't pull back, like he had done when Pansy had. "Ssshhh. Don't talk about that now. We'll worry about it later."

< >Draco sighed and leaned against her slightly.

< >He didn't realize he had fallen asleep until he was being shaken violently. Opening his eyes, Draco saw Hermione looking at him urgently, holding her lit wand. He jumped to his feet. "What time is it?" he asked shrilly.

< >"One in the morning," Hermione said sharply, looking stricken.

< >"Oh, God . . ."

< >"Filch!"

< >"Mrs. Norris!" Draco cursed. "We're going to be in trouble."

< >"We already are! People are going to realize we're not there - and what if someone's awake?" Hermione said shrilly.

< >The two stared at each other, wide-eyed with shock and fear.

< >"We can't make ourselves invisible!"

< >"For God's sake, I know!" Hermione hissed.

< >Draco cursed again, scowling. "Let's go," he said, striding to the trapdoor.

< >Hermione muttered to her wand, the light going out instantly. The room darkened immediately - the candle had blown out probably hours before. Fumbling in the darkness, Draco ripped open the door, and the two quickly, though as quietly as possibly, hurried down the stairs, and ran to the charmed corridor.

< >Filch was standing right outside it, his back turned to them. Who knew where Mrs. Norris was and God help them that she wasn't around. Draco and Hermione spun around as soon as they saw him and flattened themselves against the wall.

< >"He knows about this place," Hermione whispered.

< >"No - " Draco cursed rancorously under his breath.

< >Hermione didn't even glance at him. She peeked around the corner, then snapped her head back. "It's dark," she said quietly, "but if he comes down here, he'll find us easily enough."

< >"Pity we haven't been trained in Apparation," Draco muttered dryly.

< >"Pity we haven't got ourselves an Invisibility - "

< >Filch coughed loudly, cutting Hermione off. "Peeves," he growled angrily - and quite loudly, as well - from outside the corridor, "what are you doing around here?" They could hear the malice in his voice.

< >"Midnight stroll," Peeves answered back oily.

< >"You're out here to cause trouble," Filch snarled.

< >Peeves cackled. "Already have, dear sir!" He said something softly and Filch shouted at him angrily, cursing, "I'll get you for that, Peeves!" There was more laughter and they heard the distinct pounding of running feet.

< >Hermione and Draco swiftly ran from the corridor and ran to their common rooms alone, giving one another a fleeting look of sheer fear and rushed excitement when they parted ways.

< >Draco slipped into his common room easily - no one was there. His dormitory was silent, with only soft snores and an occasional grunt as he pulled on his night clothes, and pulled himself into bed.

< >They had been lucky that time. It was sheer luck. Peeves was good for some situations, Draco had to admit to himself as he slowly fell asleep.

A year and a month later . . .

< >Draco sighed as he leaned against Hermione, content. She fluffed his hair gently, letting her fingers slide down the back of his neck. He took her hands in his and rubbed them with his fingers.

< >After a moment, Hermione said, "I think Harry and Ron suspect something."

< >Draco stiffened immediately. "Why do you think that?" he asked slowly.

< >Hermione hesitated, taking her hands away. "Harry handed me a piece of parchment yesterday . . ." Again, she paused. "It was from a while ago, I don't know why I kept it, but I did," she said, scoffing herself. "It was the note that said . . ."

< >"I love you," Draco finished softly.

< >Hermione closed her eyes, taking her hands from him. "He looked at me funny when he gave it to me. At least you didn't sign it, but I am very sure he will have told Ron by today . . ."

< >"The whole Slytherin house thinks I'm up to something. Crabbe let it slip I was seeing a Ravenclaw - like I told you last month - so they've been hounding that whole house, trying to figure out who."

< >"You said someday someone would find out," Hermione whispered.

< >Draco turned on his side and Hermione tenderly smoothed his hair

down with one hand, the other taking one of his own. He held onto her hand tightly and protectively, his eyes closed.

< >"If someone finds out . . . they all find out . . ."

< >"Do you think we should be honest with everyone?" Hermione asked.

< >Draco felt so tired. "I don't know," he said, sounding rather annoyed. "Let's go." He rose to his feet and held out a hand for Hermione, which she took. "Quidditch tomorrow."

< >Hermione rubbed her cheek against his. "Big day."

< >"Yeah," Draco muttered, his eyes closed. "Decision if we play in the cup against Gryffindor . . . We didn't last year." He sighed and reopened his eyes, pulling himself away to look at her. "You'll come, right?"

< >"Of course," Hermione promised as they left the tower. "I always do."

< >In the morning, Crabbe shook Draco awake. Draco mumbled something incoherent to him and Crabbe shook him again so that Draco would open his eyes this time.

< >"Wake up!" he said urgently, looking grave. "There's been a fire."

< >The blood from Draco's face rushed away. \_Oh, God, the candle!\_ He jumped out of bed and dressed as quickly as he could, then followed Crabbe and half of the remaining Slytherin house to the Great Hall.

< >Albus Dumbledore stood from the teacher's table when everyone was in. "Never in my life," he began in a cold voice, "has this happened. Yes, yes, a fire here, a fire there. Old news, really, but what angers me more than the ignorance of not blowing out a simple candle, is that \_someone\_ was in an illegal area of the school.

< >"No student should have known the entrance to the Fire Tower, as Mr. Filch called it during the night. Mr. Filch, myself, and a few other teachers were the only ones who \_should\_ have known about this entrance."

< >The whole school stared at him.

< >Dumbledore cleared his throat and continued. "An ancient old desk was the only item damaged, as it was the only item in the room, besides the candle that lit the fire. Professor Snape and Mr. Filch swiftly saved the desk before it was further damaged.

< >"In short conclusion, if the perpetrators come forward within the hour, the least you will get is a detention. It is merely a slap on the wrists - for if the fire had not been seen, rather, smelled, much of the school could have been in flames, if the wind had willed it. I will release you all to breakfast now," he said finally. "Remember, within the hour." With that, he strode out of the Great Hall in silence.

## 6. Part 6

### Across Enemy Lines

< >The room exploded into whispers and amidst the chaos, Hermione and Draco exchanged swift, fearful glances, then looked down again.

< >"Who do you think did it?" Crabbe asked him suddenly.

< >Draco shrugged. "I don't know. Secret entrance, eh?"

< >Crabbe laughed. "I'll bet the ones who did it will come groveling."

< >\_Don't count on it\_, Draco thought to himself miserably. He looked up and saw Hermione arguing angrily with Harry Potter and Ronald Weasley who both looked very suspicious.

< >Draco pushed away from the table, Crabbe and Goyle looking up, surprised. "I'm not hungry," he mumbled in explanation, "I'm going to go get ready." He walked out of the Great Hall.

< >As he was walking to his common room, a voice spoke behind him.

< >"Did you ever have an intent in telling me, Mr. Malfoy?"

< >Draco jumped and spun around. He stepped backward in surprise.

< >Professor Dumbledore looked at him harshly. "I know it was you," he said quietly, gravely, somberly, a bit angrily. As if he was sorely disappointed in Draco. "I ask you answer my question. Did you ever have an intent on telling me?"

< >Draco began backing up more. "What's it to you?" he growled, startling himself.

< >Dumbledore looked at him in surprise. "It is my business."

< >"Hardly," Draco scoffed, his confidence growing, though he thought it was probably fear and anger crashing together like the Medieval knights in war. He was truly infuriated and he didn't know why. "Now, tell me, how do you know?"

< >"The Bloody Baron spotted you leaving the charmed corridor. Last night. With another." Dumbledore looked Draco hard in the eye. "He did not recognize that person who was with you and he went straight to me."

< >"The Bloody Baron has no business spying on me, nor do anyone of the other ghosts. Or you, professor," Draco said slowly and angrily. He looked up at Dumbledore, eyes full of anger toward a man he hardly knew or even cared to know. You can't trust him, Draco told himself. He's too suspicious . . . he spies, he deceived, and he gets what he wants!

< >"I beg your pardon, Mr. Malfoy, but please show some respect," said Dumbledore icily, looking Draco in the eye still.



< >Draco heard people coming around the corner and he swooped into a large bow, followed with a curtsy. "There," he said in a sickly-sweet voice, "was that respectable enough for you, \_sir\_?" He curtsied again for show.

< >The people coming up behind him burst out laughing, having no idea the real situation.

< >"Now, if you will excuse me, professor," Draco said quietly. "I have a match to get to." Before he could walk away, Dumbledore snatched his arm angrily, and said in a hard voice just above a whisper, "Come with me, Mr. Malfoy."

< >Whoever was behind Draco - he hadn't looked - turned and walked quickly away from the scene. Dumbledore glared down at Draco and led him - still by the arm - to Professor McGonagall's office.

< >"Silly me," Dumbledore began sarcastically as soon as Draco had been seated, "I thought \_I\_ was the student for a moment and \_you\_ were the headmaster! Well, now that I know the truth of who is who in the school," he sneered at Draco, "and you \_will\_ answer my question. \_Did you ever have any intent on telling me that you lit the candle\_?" Dumbledore sat down at his desk.

< >"No," Draco said flatly and snidely.

< >Dumbledore looked as if he had known the answer.

< >"Sir," Draco began coldly, "if you knew my answer, why bother taking us both through this mockery? Why not expel dear old Mr. Draco Malfoy - the son of a prejudice pureblood? I \_am\_ - as I am assured by the look on your face - a \_mean, cruel, idiotic\_ person! Why not throw the naughty little boy out of Hoggwarts?"

< >Dumbledore looked at him, clearly dubious. "Why would I throw you out?"

< >Draco threw back his head and laughed. "Well, you seemed \_so\_ intent on catching me in a lie - and you did, I might add," he replied sarcastically, laughing scornfully again. "I mean, \_why not\_?"

< >"I do not throw you out because I believe it was an accident."

< >"But you \_had\_ to make a big scene of it, didn't you?" Draco sneered. "You \_had\_ to make me uncomfortable? Does it please you so, dear old professor to make \_me\_ - of \_all\_ people! - uncomfortable? Uneasy? Wriggle in my seat and sweat while you tell a lucrative and ludicrous story? Does it so?" Draco glared.

< >Dumbledore sighed and opened his mouth to speak, but Draco cut him off.

< >"Would you \_stop\_ sighing?" Draco demanded angrily, jumping to his feet. "Are you trying to make me feel \_bad\_ about what I just said? About my \_life\_? Bloody hell, I admit, I hate my home life, but does that give you the right to try to make me - and everyone else you suck in - feel bad?" He was nearly screaming.

< >Dumbledore looked at him, studying. "I have obviously not 'sucked'

you in."

< >"Damn straight," Draco snapped at the old professor. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a match." He twirled on his heel and stalked out of the room angrily, fists at his sides. The door to the office slammed behind him.

< >Later that day, at the Quidditch match, Draco spotted Professor Dumbledore in the crowd, looking up at him profoundly. He mirrored the look and turned his broom away.

< >"\_Get him\_" the Slytherin team shouted at Draco suddenly, a long hour later.

< >Looking up, Draco immediately pulled up on his broom and zoomed after the new Ravenclaw Seeker, streaking towards the heavens. He quickly passed the younger fourth year who looked stricken and angry when he saw Draco, pulling away when Draco caught the Snitch easily.

~

< >"Great job, Draco!" a very tall fifth year bellowed, slapping Draco on the back.

< >There was a party being held for the Quidditch team in the common room, as all they had to do was beat Gryffindor! \_Which\_, Draco said to many people, \_would be a task in itself. The Gryffindor team was strong.\_ Those people just laughed nervously - looking at him strangely - and said that he could do it, then walked quickly away.

~

< >"Good work, Malfoy," Hermione muttered to him on Monday with a hint of amusement in her voice as they passed each other, handing him a note which he quickly stuffed into his book bag.

< >"Thanks," he mumbled back, though they had already walked by each other.

< >"What?" Crabbe asked, looking at him.

< >"Nothing, just me talking to myself." Draco smiled and shoved Crabbe into their next classroom, both laughing. Draco had made a point to get to know Crabbe, or Vincent, as he hated to be called, better through the past year and a half.

< >Draco opened the letter as he sat at his desk during his class.

\_Draco, \_

\_< >This is only to say I was impressed at your performance at the match on Saturday. Really good job, so be proud. I'm sorry we didn't get a word over the weekend, but we both know why. \_

\_ \_

\_< >Now, in final reply to what you wrote a while ago, I love you,

too, more than life.\_

< >It wasn't signed and lucky thing, too, since it was snatched out of Draco's hands suddenly, nearly tearing in half. He looked up immediately, stricken, and trembling from head to foot.

< >Professor McGonagall glared down at him, letter in hand. "Class has started, Mr. Malfoy, if you didn't know. I don't appreciate students not paying attention," she said coldly. "Now, let's see what this is about." She peered down at the letter, smiling, thinking about how much pleasure she would get from reading it aloud.

< >Draco forced himself to stop trembling and looked at McGonagall carefully as she read the note to herself. Her smile quickly faded as she read the last line and she folded it up, handing it back to Draco, surprising everyone.

< >"Interesting, Mr. Malfoy," the professor told him carefully, clearing her throat loudly, causing everyone to look at her instead of Draco. "Please see me after class, I want a word. Now, class, back to my lecture . . . No, Mr. Goyle, you cannot go to the bathroom. Not for the third time - what are you doing in there?"

< >Draco laughed along with the rest of the class, but he was nervous, and nearly shaking as the end of Transfiguration came closer, and closer, and closer . . . until it was finally the end of class and everyone was leaving.

< >"Professor?" Draco croaked as he stood in front of McGonagall's desk. "You wished to speak to me?" He was very sure that she would recognize Hermione's graceful handwriting . . .

< >McGonagall looked up at him and folded her hands on the desk. "Yes, Mr. Malfoy. I wanted a word." She sighed. "You realize that I had every right to read that letter aloud?"

< >"Yes, ma'am," Draco replied quickly.

< >"Do you know why I didn't?"

< >"Because it was personal," he said tonelessly, yet almost sarcastically.

< >McGonagall looked amused. "Yes," she agreed. He looked up at her, surprised. "I have every right to read aloud notes, letters, or what have you, but I didn't - because it was personal. Very personal - and short to the point, but that's not the reason I wanted to speak with you."

< >Draco blinked. "What did you want to talk to me about?"

< >"Sit down, Draco," she instructed and when he had, she continued. "As we have stated before, that letter that you have tucked deep inside your book bag, was and still is very personal. Whoever wrote that, loves you."

< >Draco nodded slowly, feeling distressed. His eyes were watery with knowing.

< >"And do you love her?" Professor McGonagall asked.

< >Draco closed his eyes. "More than anything. More than life itself," he whispered quietly, speaking the honest and truest of truths of one of his heart's many forbidden secrets. He opened his eyes to look at his professor.

< >McGonagall allowed a very small smile, startling Draco slightly, but he recovered himself. "You pour your heart out to her?" she asked and he nodded solemnly. "Is she another Slytherin?"

< >Surprising the both of them in different ways, Draco shook his head. "No."

< >"Ravenclaw?" The answer was, again, no. "Hufflepuff?"

< >Draco gathered himself and stood up, dignified. "Professor McGonagall," he said slowly and softly, "you saw the handwriting. And if that doesn't convince you - really, Hufflepuff?" He smirked a bit at the irony he found in her query. "What do you really think?" With that, he walked briskly out of the room.

< >"What took you so long?" Hermione hissed.

< >"Professor McGonagall . . . she knows," Draco whispered back as they both slipped down a usually unused hallway. "She read the note, snatched it right off my desk, for God's sakes. She scared me half to death, but she knows."

< >Hermione looked about to cry. "It's coming out."

< >Draco hugged her awkwardly, about to cry himself, but both of them, deep down, knew they wanted to out of happiness - there would be no more secrecy. "We can't say we didn't expect it." he mumbled.

< >Hermione shook her head, resting it slowly on his shoulder. "No, no, of course. You knew, I knew, but I didn't want to admit it." She gripped his hand tightly and he held hers just as tightly.

< >"Dumbledore came to me . . . oh, God, he knows that I burned the tower!" Draco swore, now feeling about to cry even more. "On - on Saturday, right before the match . . . he pulled me into an office and starts telling me he knows about the candle because the Bloody Baron saw me and you, but he couldn't tell who you were . . . And then he goes off trying to mess with my head, trying to confuse me . . ." He silenced himself.

< >Hermione pulled away from him, still holding his hands. She looked up into his eyes. "We burned the tower, Draco. It was all really my fault," she whispered, looking away. "I lit the candle; I should have blown it out."

< >"No, don't . . . please," Draco said, pulling away a bit, reluctant. Then, suddenly: "What happened to Weasley's chairs?" he demanded shrilly. "Dumbledore said there was only one piece of furniture in the tower and -"

< >"Ssshhh," Hermione said, smiling rather sadly. "I told you long ago - didn't I? - that they were old dollhouse armchairs. I know I did." She shook her head. "Just a stupid potion or two . . . easy

enough, I guess."

< >"Potions that enlarges an object, then shrink it when fire hits it?" Draco asked meekly, and Hermione nodded.

< >"Yes," she said, "exactly. Simple." Hermione sighed. "Evidence? What evidence? All is destroyed . . ."

< >Draco bit his lip and looked down, his eyes closed, trying to block tears that suddenly overcame him. He whispered a few words too low for even Draco himself to hear them correctly. Hermione looked up at him. "What?" she asked.

< >He smiled weakly at her. "Oh, God, I love you."

< >Hermione took a hand and slid it across his cheek slowly, her fingers gently trailing over the white scar that Draco was sure would never go away. As her fingers slipped past his mouth, he kissed two of her fingers, looking her in the eye the whole time.

< >Draco stepped back after a moment of silence, shaking his head. "Even if everyone finds out tomorrow, we'll still love each other, right?" he asked, nearly whimpering.

< >Hermione smiled warmly, taking his arm. "Yes, Draco, always."

< >A few minutes later, at lunch, when, after he had put his book bag away, while Hermione had gone on, Draco entered the Great Hall, it silenced almost immediately at the sight of him. Hermione was looking around, confused and bewildered as he slowly sat at the head of the Slytherin table.

< >Suspicious immediately, Draco snapped his head up to the head table where Professor Dumbledore looked extremely stern and grave, along with the rest of the teachers, besides McGonagall, who was still in her classroom. Hermione, also suspecting, looked up at the table, as well did the rest of the hall.

< >Dumbledore stood up and cleared his throat. "Mr. Malfoy," he said loudly, "please stand up." Even from the Slytherin table, Draco could see the twinkle of determination in his eye.

< >Draco glared up at the man, but stood, righteous.

< >Dumbledore, satisfied, turned to the rest of the hall. "You all have heard rumors, you all know different stories - why, you might have even heard of Mr. Malfoy bowing and curtsying to me on Saturday." He chuckled. "Well, that is probably the only story you have heard that is true.

< >"And yet, I believe most of you think I am wrong. There is another story, you say, isn't that correct?" the older man queried of the whole hall and many nodded, but stayed silent.

< >"What is this about?" Draco demanded angrily and suddenly.

< >The entire hall looked at him and so did Professor McGonagall when she suddenly entered, stopping immediately. A few seconds after that, a voice began to speak snidely.

< >"Draco," called the irritable voice Draco instantly recognized, stiffening, "there is another story - that story - and we all know it. At least, most of us." Pansy smiled at the back of his head. "And a \_few\_ of us know a \_third\_ story."

< >Slowly, Draco turned to her. "And what is \_that\_ supposed to mean?" he snarled.

< >Hermione pulled herself to her feet. "Yes, dear Pansy," she called maliciously from across the room, "what \_is\_ that supposed to mean?" Glancing at her quickly, Draco saw a look of complete fury on her face.

The rest of the school didn't know who to look at with more surprise.

< >Pansy leered at Draco, ignoring Hermione's question. Her face looked victorious. "Pity, Draco," she said slowly and clearly, "last year, you nearly went on a mutiny on your own house - "

< >"\_Hardly\_," Draco sneered. "You and Professor Snape were the mutineers! You both are lying and cheating and \_complete\_ idiots!" He pointed accusingly at Snape, who looked him back in the eye from the head table, silent. Draco swore softly and lowered his finger.

< >The Great Hall stared, shocked at the yelling, but Pansy continued, undaunted. "You were never around, people said you were with a \_Ravenclaw\_, some said a Hufflepuff - but that's a laugh, isn't it? -" the Hufflepuff table bristled "- and \_you\_ lost the Cups for us."

< >Draco laughed bitterly. "\_What\_? Blame \_me\_ for \_your\_ loss?"

< >Again, Pansy continued, ignoring his remark. "Then, \_this\_ year, you were again, \_never\_ around, though a little more, from the end of last year, I guess. You have seemed to become more \_social\_, but we all know it was \_you\_ that was in the tower," she said, voice raising as she pointed a long finger at him accusingly, "we \_know\_ it was you that set the tower on fire, \_and\_ we \_know\_ you were with someone! At least \_I\_ do!"

< >The Great Hall looked at Draco, quite - in mild terms - interested.

< >"What is your point, Ms. Parkinson?" Dumbledore demanded calmly and quietly. "I let you go on without my own, personal interruption, until now. What \_are\_ you getting at?" His eyes were lit with fire.

< >"And \_who\_ was it, Draco?" Pansy asked quietly, ignoring Dumbledore. "\_Who\_?"

< >"Who do you \_think\_ it was, Pansy?" Draco replied defiantly.

< >"\_Her\_," Pansy yelled, pointing, "if that wasn't obvious to you idiots in the first place!"

< >The Great Hall swiveled in their seats and found themselves staring at Hermione. Many gasped in amazement, but many just stared, dumbfounded, and paralyzed with anger and surprise.

< >Draco gathered himself quickly and strode across the room, taking Hermione's hand, and leading her into the middle of the hall. "Look, Hermione," he said, looking her in the eye. "They found out. I always said they would."

< >Hermione smiled at him slowly, understanding. "So they did and so you said."

< >"Earlier, what did I say?"

< >"You said, 'Even if everyone finds out tomorrow, we'll still love each other, right?'" Hermione replied solemnly. "But everyone will not find out tomorrow, will they?"

< >"No, obviously, but you said always," Draco murmured, gazing at her.

< >Both Draco and Hermione, still holding one another's hand, began walking in a small, slow circle, locking their eyes together. Each had a small, amused smile dancing around their faces like a drunken piper at festival time in merry Old England.

< >"We both knew," Draco said.

< >"Yes. We did," Hermione agreed solemnly.

< >"How long has it been that we have seen each other?" Draco asked.

< >"Hmm," Hermione said almost snidely, "I don't know. Do you?"

< >"Why do you always answer a question with a question?"

< >"I don't."

< >"Oh, yes, of course. No, you don't, not usually," Draco replied, smiling at her. "I believe it has been a year and a month - to this date exactly, actually - that we have been seeing each other."

< >"In hallways, passing notes, sitting in the now burned tower for hours, just talking. We would take the secret passage one at a time, walk the long journey to the trapdoor and sometimes stay there for hours, falling asleep in each others arms, then having to get around Filch." Hermione threw back her head and laughed shortly.

< >"Picture perfect times," Draco said quietly and dryly, smirking a bit. "And then one day, a professor caught me reading a note from you. That was quite interesting, I must say, eh, Hermione?"

< >"Yes, it was, Draco. And that was today, was it not?"

< >"Yes, very much today. I believe it said - and I quote - '\_Now, in final reply to what you wrote a while ago, I love you, too, more than life\_.' And I told Professor McGonagall earlier that I loved you more than anything - than life itself - and I spoke the truth from my heart," Draco finished, tears suddenly streaming down his face. Oh, how he loved her.

< >They stopped, but still stared into each other's eyes.

< >"This is a trick!" Ronald Weasley shouted suddenly, jumping to his feet, glaring. "It is a trick! How can they even stand one another! She hates you, Draco. Do you know that, or is this just a show?"

< >Draco turned to him, silent.

< >"What are you both trying to prove?" Weasley said coldly, continuing when Draco still didn't speak. "That you two could actually even have a conversation? Ha!" he laughed mockingly. "That could possibly happen, but being together for over a year? You couldn't have pulled that off!"

< >"I love her," Draco whispered hoarsely, beginning to cry again.

< >Weasley stared at him, indubitably stunned at the sound of sincerity in his weakening voice, and more stunned because of his tears, that couldn't possibly be faked by the way Draco looked.

< >"If you could love her," Pansy sneered loudly, from behind, "why couldn't you love me?" Draco didn't turn to her, but she continued anyway. "You are a traitor, Draco Malfoy," she said coldly. "And you are leading us all on! Traitor!"

< >"Traitor is as traitor does, then," Hermione sneered back, tightening her grip on Draco's hand, as if it was her only way from keeping her from attacking Pansy. "It wasn't Draco that led me, either. I charged forward beside him."

< >Pansy rounded on her, walking around the two like a stealth cat, pushing Weasley out of the way angrily. "Trying to protect yourself now, lowly Gryffindor?" she snarled a bit pathetically. "He may not care for me, but I hate you."

< >Draco pulled away from Hermione, tears gone, and furious. He grabbed Pansy by the shoulders and shook her angrily, to the utter shock of the Great Hall who all started shouting in protest and worry. "Do we care, Pansy?" he shouted in her face, still shaking her. "DO - WE - CARE? NO!"

< >Suddenly, arms grabbed him from behind, forcing him to let go, and she stumbled backwards into a chair, staring in surprise. As they dragged him from Pansy, Draco continued to yell and tried to get away. "Let me go, you damned idiots! She is the idiot! LET - ME - GO!"

< >Hermione suddenly appeared in his face, grabbing his shirt collar roughly. The loud hall silenced and whoever had Draco lessened their grip on him reluctantly, but still held his arms securely behind his back.

< >"Draco, calm down," she whispered, putting her face against his, speaking into his ear. "It's all right, just calm down." She was crying and Draco began crying again, dropping his head onto her shoulder. "Just calm down," Hermione kept repeating soothingly.

< >Draco raised his head after a moment to look at her and she pulled away. As he tried to pull away, the grips tightened around his arms. He was forced to relax and panted for a minute, then looked back up



at Hermione.

## 7. Part 7

### \_Across Enemy Lines\_

< >"It - it's - " he sputtered miserably. "It's insane. I know it is, you know it is, they all know it is! They've made it oh, so clear!" His face was red and tears still streamed down his face involuntarily as he turned his head this way and that to look at the staring hall. "Hardly any of them believe it," he whispered to her, "but I believe it. It was so maddening to me in the beginning, and up until just seconds ago, it still was, but . . . but I all I know now it that . . . more than anything . . . I love you."

< >Hermione wiped her eyes and looked him straight in the eye, her tears also still flowing. "I love you, too, Draco," she whispered back. She looked behind him. "Let him go." Nothing happened. "Let him go!" Hermione yelled, the grips suddenly releasing, and sending him into the floor, landing in a heap.

< >Draco stayed there for a moment too long, he suspected, and Hermione kneeled in front of him. She reached out and touched his scar, making him look up at her. He saw Pansy staring at him over her shoulder and he smiled at Hermione lovingly. Pansy stalked away.

< >Two arms grabbed his arms suddenly and pulled him too his feet. Turning his head, Draco saw Crabbe and Weasley looking at him solemnly, then he turned his head back to Hermione.

< >The Great Hall was still silent, everyone holding their breath. Professor Dumbledore looked rather shocked, along with the rest of the professors, especially Professor Snape, who looked on, white as a sheet, appearing about to faint, yet with a small, almost knowing smile gracing his face.

< >As Draco tried to step forward, he found exhaustion overtaking him, and he began to crumple to the floor. Three people caught him this time from behind - Crabbe, Weasley, and Harry Potter - and held him up, causing him to sort of slant toward Hermione.

< >"If you love him so," Weasley said from behind quietly, "prove it, Hermione."

< >Hermione threw back her head and laughed. "I will prove it, Ron, I will." And with that, she threw her arms around Draco's neck, and kissed him more passionately than she ever had.

< >Crabbe, Weasley, and Harry Potter let go and he swung his arms around Hermione, loving her right back. They held on tightly, even after their lips parted from the other, gazing into each other's eyes, tears gone forever now.

< >There was a short, silent pause in the room, then the hall erupted in loud shouting and clapping. Draco and Hermione looked around, bewildered, and many started laughing as they walked over to the two.

< >A strong hand closed around Draco's shoulder and he looked up,

startled. Snape looked down at him, silent, until he said in a soft, almost pained voice, "At least you didn't lose her, Mr. Malfoy."

< >"I could have, professor," Draco replied in a whisper.

< >Snape now seemed ready to cry. "But I did." He then walked from the room.

< >Draco suddenly felt eyes on him and his eyes flew around, finally settling on Harry Potter, who looked from him to the fleeing Professor Snape. "Don't worry about him," Potter said, smiling slightly. "He didn't lose her all the way." Potter then followed after Snape quickly.

< >Hermione smiled at Draco and he rested his head against hers.

< >"There is still the matter of the fire, Mr. Malfoy," Dumbledore's voice boomed suddenly. He appeared in front of the two; the crowd around quickly parted, moving to the side.

< >"Professor Dumbledore, sir," Hermione said quickly, detaching herself from Draco. She swept up to Dumbledore gracefully. "Might I have my say?" She didn't wait for an answer. "I was with Draco, and I always blow out the candle, so it was my fault . . ."

< >Draco snatched her arm and pulled her back to him. "What are you doing?" he hissed into her ear. "Leave it to be my fault, Hermione! Think about your grades! Your future!"

< >"You are my future, Draco," Hermione said quietly, kissing him tenderly.

< >Draco and Hermione wrapped their arms around each other again as they kissed, leaning against the other. "I love you so much, you know," he murmured to her after they parted lips.

< >"How many times have you told me?" Hermione whispered back, settling her chin on his shoulder.

< >"Many times and many more to come, my love," Draco replied, crying happily into Hermione's hair.

End  
file.